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Pope Shenouda III, portrait of the week by Bahgory 8

Shooting before the deal

As Arafat and Netanyahu were readying to sign an agreement on Hebron, a renegade Israeli soldier shot seven Palestinians. **Tarek Hassan** reports from Gaza

A 19-year-old Israeli soldier bent on scuppering an Israeli troop withdrawal in Hebron opened fire with an automatic rifle in the city's crowded vegetable market yesterday, wounding seven Palestinians, two of them seriously.

The army later imposed a curfew on the city of 130,000 to prevent an escalation of violence, after Palestinian youths burned tyres and hurled stones at troops to protest the incident. Nine Palestinians were injured in beatings by Israeli soldiers trying to keep the crowd from the scene, the Associated Press reported.

The shooting occurred while negotiators were attempting to put the final touches on an agreement for a partial Israeli military withdrawal from Hebron, the last city in the West Bank to remain under Israeli control.

In a telephone call to Yasser Arafat, Israeli Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu described the shooting as a "criminal act", which underlined the need to wrap up negotiations on transferring most of Hebron to the Palestinian Authority quickly, Netanyahu told a news conference.

"I want to be clear on this," Netanyahu said. "The agreement is necessary to prevent this type of violence. The delays in the negotiations only create instability and uncertainty... and lead to situations of the type that we saw today... No crime or violence will stand in our way to complete the job."

Netanyahu and other Israeli officials said the soldier had told police that he wanted to halt progress towards an agreement on Hebron and to prevent troop redeployment. "This man was trying to sabotage peace," said Defence Minister Yitzhak Mordechai, who toured the scene of the shooting.

The shooting stirred memories of the 1994 massacre in which an American-born settler donned an army uniform and opened fire in the Ibrahimi Mosque, also known as the Tomb of the Patriarchs, a shrine holy to both Muslims and Jews in downtown Hebron. Twenty-nine Muslim worshippers were killed, along with the settler, Baruch Goldstein, an immigrant from New York.

The Palestinian mayor of Hebron, Mustafa Natche, demanded that the 500 Jewish settlers who live alongside the city's 130,000 Palestinians be disarmed.

The gunman in the New Year's Day attack was identified as Noam Friedman, a resident of the Jewish West Bank settlement of Maale Adumim, near Jerusalem. Friedman was drafted five months ago and served in a logistics unit in Israel. He had not been assigned to duty in Hebron. Israeli investigators were checking reports that he had been staying with Hebron settlers at the time of the attack.

The attack occurred at around 9.30am yesterday, when Friedman, wearing an army uniform, opened fire with his M-16 automatic rifle in a crowded Palestinian vegetable market. Passers-by scrambled for cover, and an elderly Arab man stumbled as he ran. Another man, still holding a plastic shopping bag, clutched his left arm, which was bleeding from a bullet wound.

"I heard the shots and ran in [the gunman's] direction. He screamed as he fired. He stood in one place and fired," said Israeli army officer Lt. Avi Buskeila. He said it took about 10 seconds before he was able to tackle and disarm the gunman.

Friedman fired between 10 and 15 rounds of ammunition, according to witnesses. Reuters cameraman Mazen Dana said that "even after the soldiers had wrestled him to the ground, he tried to put a second magazine into his gun."

"It happened right in front of me," said vegetable seller Walid Kafisheh. "I tried to stop him but the soldiers got to him first. Then soldiers and police came from everywhere, shooting."

Reuters quoted witnesses as saying that soldiers guarding the nearby Avraham Avinu settlement had fired into the market, thinking that they were under attack.

Clashes erupted between Palestinian stone-throwers and Israeli troops following the shooting. Six Israeli jeeps came under a hail of stones, and demonstrators burned tyres.

President Bill Clinton's Middle East envoy, Dennis Ross, said that both sides must now redouble their efforts to conclude an agreement. "Those who use violence cannot be permitted to be the arbiters of the future," Ross said in a statement.

Palestinian negotiators said the shooting underscored their claims that the Palestinians needed protection from Jewish militants, rather than vice versa, as the Israelis have claimed. "Now it is clear who is in danger," commented Jabril Rajoub, head of Palestinian security police in the West Bank.

Arafat's spokesman, Nabil Abu Roudeina, said the Palestinian leader "condemns this crime, which harms the security of the Palestinian people and is aimed at sabotaging the peace accords. We call on the Israeli government to immediately put an end to such acts and help protect the peace process."

The Middle East News Agency said Arafat and President Hosni Mubarak had discussed the shooting incident and the negotiations in a long-distance telephone conversation.

A Palestinian negotiator told *Al-Ahram Weekly* that the issue of a Palestinian presence at the Ibrahimi Mosque remained unresolved and would be addressed by Arafat and Netanyahu when they met at the agreement-signing summit. The signing would not be delayed, the negotiator said, even if the two leaders failed to reach a solution.



photo: Randa Shaath



photos: Sherif Sonbol





Ramadan lanterns, toy Santas and other Christmas trappings vied for space on shop stands (far left), while New Year's Eve revellers celebrated especially hard, in hotels (above and left) and on the streets (top). *See story below*

Reclaiming the desert

PRESIDENT Hosni Mubarak is soon to uncover plans for promoting an Egyptian renaissance in the 21st century. According to Prime Minister Kamal El-Ganzouri, the plans, using the country's development over the past 15 years as a springboard, will rely heavily on implementing Mubarak's vision for the development of areas west of the Nile Valley by means of a number of huge national projects in southern Egypt.

At a cabinet meeting last week, El-Ganzouri reviewed maps outlining land use for projects in the New Valley, to be concluded by the year 2017. The blueprints for these schemes will be presented to Mubarak at the site in early January, when he will give the signal for work to begin on what has become "Egypt's twenty-first century project."

The land use maps include 44 new residential compounds, areas earmarked for desert reclamation and desert safaris, and industrial and tourism zones.

The projects will ease the imbalance of population distribution, enabling 58 per cent of Egypt's land to be inhabited; at present the population lives on only four per cent of the land.

Exit Ghali

UN SECRETARY-General Boutros Ghali left office on Tuesday, at the end of a turbulent five year-term. He stated that his greatest achievement had been to preserve a minimum of independence for the UN while his biggest failure was his inability to conquer the UN budget crisis.

Ghali is expected to arrive in Cairo on Thursday after a stopover in Paris. Kofi Annan, the seventh UN Secretary General, took office yesterday and will receive a full-honour guard tomorrow.

Settlers' cash

ISRAEL'S 1997 budget was approved by parliament five hours into the new year following the government's forced reversal on its pledge not to raise taxes. The 188 billion shekel ($58 billion) budget, which included massive spending cuts, allocates more than $12 million for expansion of existing settlements in the Syrian Golan Heights, the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

Finance Minister Dan Meridor told Israeli radio that 5 million shekels ($1.6 million) will be allotted for public buildings in the Golan Heights and an undisclosed amount for 300 new homes in Golan settlements. Another 34 million shekels ($11 million) will go to settlements in the Gaza Strip and the Jordan River Valley. Both the opposition Meretz Party and the Peace Now group charge that additional covert funding for settlements is being channelled through other government ministries.

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Last dance of the century

Egyptians celebrated New Year's Eve on the streets, and in bars and nightclubs — but this style of public festivity is unlikely to be repeated until 2001. **Dina Ezzat** joined the revellers

Cairo has often been described as a night city. Nightfall tends to bring an added allure to the most ordinary of Cairene scenes. But Tuesday night was no ordinary night — it was the last time for three years that Egyptians will be able to celebrate New Year's Eve by drinking in public and watching belly dancing.

The beginnings of the next three years — 1998, 1999 and 2000 — will coincide with the holy month of Ramadan, in which the public consumption of alcohol — except by foreigners — is banned and bellydancing performances prohibited.

Anticipation of these restrictions brought thousands of people out of their homes and into the city's streets, bars, discos and nightclubs, bent on having a great night out. Not only were bars and drink shops packed with customers, but drivers of pick-up trucks risked arrest to cruise downtown streets selling cases of local beer to passing motorists. Many women arriving at five-star hotels wore short, figure-hugging outfits, and the belly dancers who entertained them sported their usual revealing costumes.

"We usually do good business on New Year's Eve, but tonight we are doing even better than usual," said the owner of a downtown liquor store. "I think it is because Ramadan is going to stop many people, particularly Muslims, from drinking alcohol for the next three New Year's Eves."

Ramadan was also cited by Hossam El-Sadat, the public relations manager of a five-star hotel, as the reason why more Egyptians than usual had joined their end-of-year celebrations.

According to the managers of several luxury hotels and restaurant-bars, Egyptians do not usually make up more than 20 per cent of those buying tickets, which range in price from LE300 to LE3,000 per person. A luxury hotel, and a spectacular show with a famous bellydancer naturally makes for a high price, but the chance to consume alcohol in convivial surroundings is also an important consideration.

"We may go out next year, but it would be different," said a middle-aged man, dining with his wife in a chic club. "As Muslims, we don't drink during Ramadan and we also fast. So we thought we should go out for a celebration this year, when we can still have a beer or two." If they managed to stay awake until dawn, the man said, they might go for an early breakfast at a restaurant overlooking the Nile, "because this again is the kind of thing that you won't be able to do next year."

The same sentiment was echoed by dozens of young men who were dancing in the streets in celebration. "I just came from a party at a friend's house," said 19-year-old Mohamed Farag, shortly after the midnight hour had struck. "Now we are going to buy some food, drinks and cassette tapes and go to the Moqattam hills to have a barbecue. Then in the morning, we will have breakfast somewhere."

But Farag's plans for next year are different. "It is going to be Ramadan and even if I went out for a late *sohour* [the pre-dawn meal before the fast begins], I would still not drink or dance with my girlfriend," he said.

Security sources estimated that the number of people who spent New Year's Eve outdoors and in public places was 10 per cent higher than the previous year. According to Maj. Gen. Lutfi El-Said, deputy security chief for the governorate of Giza, more policemen had been deployed this year "to make sure that there are no problems."

"We are aware of the special nature of this New Year's Eve and we are taking all the necessary measures to make sure that it will pass safely," he said, while inspecting the situation in Gama'at Al-Dowal Al-Arabiya Street in Mohandessin.

But for some, this New Year's Eve was no different from any other. "We don't do anything special for the new year. We just go out for a walk, buy the kids some sandwiches and go home after midnight to watch a little television," said Fadila Mohamed, a veiled woman, as she walked down another Mohandessin street around midnight. "Next year, we will be doing the same, because we go out at night in Ramadan anyway."

To make sure that business will not suffer on the eve of 1998, the managers of Cairo's upmarket hotels are already considering plans to lend a Ramadan flavour to their celebrations. "We know that we cannot serve alcohol to Egyptians, but we still have our foreign guests. And although we cannot have the famous bellydancers like Dina and Lucy, we can still have a group of dancers in conservative costumes perform a folkloric dance," said Nabila Samak, the public relations manager of a five-star hotel.

And food and beverage managers at five-star hotels were confident that the catering business would do very well over the next three end-of-year celebrations. According to the director of the catering department of a famous chain of restaurants, "There is no law that can stop people from having parties at home. And if most of the parties are going to take place indoors, it just means we will be doing a lot of deliveries."

Images of '96: a 16-page tabloid supplement

Advice on Hebron

PALESTINIAN President Yasser Arafat was in Cairo this week seeking President Hosni Mubarak's advice on a number of the problematic issues obstructing the Hebron deal. Arriving at Cairo airport on Sunday, Arafat said he would inform Mubarak of the problems and seek his advice "because we are passing through a very delicate and critical phase." Arafat said difficulties blocking the agreement included the Israeli army's right to hot pursuit in Palestinian-controlled areas, armaments, a buffer zone and a date for the resumption of final-status negotiations.

After a tête-à-tête, the two leaders were joined by Osama El-Baz, Mubarak's top political adviser, Nabil Abu Redena, Arafat's adviser, Palestinian negotiators Mahmoud Abbas and Saeb Erekat, as well as Palestinian International Cooperation Minister Nabil Shaath.

After the talks, El-Baz described Arafat's visit as "very significant" because it came at a time when the Palestinians and Israelis were very close to ending their differences on outstanding issues in the interim agreement. Shaath said that Mubarak's and Arafat's meeting aimed at keeping the Egyptian leadership informed of the details of recent developments in negotiations, "because Egypt is a principal and permanent partner" in resolving the Palestinian problem.

The next day, Mubarak received eight members of the Israeli Peace Now movement, which expressed its interest in linking up with peace forces in the Arab world. Peace Now is a leading left-wing group in Israel that supports exchanging occupied territory for peace with the Arabs.

El-Baz, who attended the 90-minute meeting, said he was pleased by the movement's "moderate position", adding that Mubarak "regularly receives representatives of various Israeli organisations to explain to them our points of view and to create a favourable Israeli public opinion of the peace process."



Showing 'signs of health'



Foreign ministers of the Damascus Declaration states ended two days of talks with a statement backing the Syrian and Palestinian positions in the peace process with Israel. **Khaled Dawoud** reports

Following a two-day conference in Cairo, foreign ministers of the Damascus Declaration states — a loose alliance comprising Egypt, Syria, and the six Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states — called on Sunday for total Israeli withdrawal from the occupied Golan Heights and Israel's acknowledgement of the Palestinians' right to establish their own state. In a concluding statement, foreign ministers of the eight member states said the two demands were preconditions for achieving peace, stability and regional cooperation.

"The Israeli government's attempt to evade their commitment to fully withdraw from the Golan Heights, which was made to the American sponsor of the peace process, represents an Israeli retreat and a threat to the foundations and terms of reference of this process," the ministers said in their statement.

The Syrian talks with Israel were suspended in March following a series of suicide bombings engineered by the Islamist resistance movement, Hamas. Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu, who came to power in June, opposed withdrawal from the Golan Heights on the grounds that it would undermine Israel's security.

Syria accused Netanyahu of retreating from a commitment which it says was made by the former Labour government of Shimon Peres to fully withdraw from the region. With reports of a near agreement between Israel and the Palestinians on the redeployment of Israeli troops from the West Bank town of Hebron, observers are hoping for a newly positive atmosphere, which could encourage the resumption of the Syrian-Israeli negotiations. According to US news reports, Washington officials hope the talks will resume following the start of President Bill Clinton's second term in January.

Syrian Foreign Minister Farouk El-Sharaa said on Sunday that Damascus would welcome the resumption of the talks with Israel according to the understandings reached with the former Labour government.

The position taken by the foreign ministers in their concluding statement reflected feelings of mistrust towards Netanyahu's government, despite reports that an agreement on Hebron was imminent.

The statement ignored the Hebron developments, upholding an earlier warning made by the Arab governments that proceeding with the normalisation of relations would remain linked to progress in the peace process and meeting Arab demands.

"The ministers confirm that establishing real ties of cooperation between regional partners in the Middle East is linked to Israel's withdrawal from all occupied Arab territories," the statement said.

Bahraini Foreign Minister Hamid Bin Jassim Al-Khalifa told reporters there was no reason for Arab countries to reconsider their policy of linking normalisation to progress in the peace process. He said the delay in reaching agreement on Hebron was evidence of Israel's failure to meet its commitments under the accords it previously concluded with the Palestinians.

And in line with the Arab policy of seeking wider international support for their position in the peace talks, the Damascus Declaration members praised Europe's growing involvement in the peace process, expressing particular appreciation to French President Jacques Chirac.

They also welcomed the United States opposition to the expansion of Jewish settlements in the Occupied Territories and urged Washington to freeze any funding to Israel which might be used for this purpose.

Turning to Iraq and the Gulf, the eight Arab ministers affirmed their condemnation of the Baghdad government, holding it responsible for the suffering of the Iraqi people. But they welcomed the newly-reached oil-for-food deal between Baghdad and the United Nations, which will partially ease the Iraqis' plight.

The statement adopted the same strong language as the last Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) meeting in Doha earlier this month concerning the dispute between the United Arab Emirates and Iran over the ownership of three Gulf islands. Ministers called for a peaceful solution to the dispute and denounced the measures taken by Iran to consolidate the occupation of the three islands, including the deployment of surface-to-surface missiles.

The Cairo meeting made no progress towards resolving a territorial dispute between GCC members Qatar and Bahrain. Foreign Minister Amr Moussa told reporters the ministers were in agreement that this dispute should be resolved within a GCC framework. The GCC ministers said they would address the dispute at a meeting in Riyadh on 6 January.

Moussa said the ministers had devoted part of their discussions to furthering economic cooperation between member states. The foreign ministers are planning to meet twice annually, with their next meeting scheduled for June in Damascus.

The Cairo conference also discussed a document entitled "Joint Arab Action," which had been approved at an earlier meeting in Syria last year. The 10-page document reiterated the Arab stance on the importance of inter-Arab cooperation in all fields, particularly economic.

Asked to assess the outcome of the Cairo meeting, Moussa said on Monday that the Damascus Declaration, which was established following the liberation of Kuwait from the Iraqi invasion in 1991, was showing "some signs of health." He said that coordination and cooperation between the member states had become "more active and effective than before." Moussa has not always been so positive. In 1995 he made headlines by declaring that the Damascus Declaration was on the point of collapse.

Caritas in tax tussle

The hungry are caught in the middle of a legal battle between the Ministry of Finance and an NGO that distributes food aid. **Mariz Tadros** reports

Widowed mothers, leprosy sufferers, and malnourished children are among the beneficiaries of a food aid programme organised by Caritas, a renowned charity and development non-governmental organisation (NGO). They may have to do without this winter, however. The Ministry of Finance's taxation department has put Caritas under a lien warning: either it pays over LE167,000 in sales tax and service charges on food aid entering the country from abroad, or it risks having its assets impounded.

Caritas-Egypt is a branch of Caritas-Internationalis, a Germany-based organisation which has been extensively involved in relief and development work amongst the world's most marginalised communities. Caritas established itself in Egypt in 1967, immediately after the Arab-Israeli war, to provide emergency assistance to the thousands of people affected by the hostilities, especially in the Suez Canal area. It was registered as an association of public utility with the Ministry of Social Affairs on 23 March 1975.

Since then, it has diversified its services to include emergency assistance for refugees, adult literacy classes, training for mentally handicapped children and their parents and development projects in rural areas. Food aid is distributed to 3,000 leprosy sufferers living in colonies at Abou Zaabal, north of Cairo, and Ameryia, about 25km south of Alexandria in the Western Desert, to malnourished pregnant women and mothers attending child care, health and nutrition awareness programmes at Caritas' educational centres in Cairo slums, and to 512 NGOs and institutions serving the poor.

Caritas receives the foodstuffs, comprising rice, vegetable oil, beans, milk and sugar, from the European Union under its food aid programme.

According to Magdi Garras, co-director of Caritas-Egypt, the organisation's food aid programme and other services have been put in jeopardy by the demand for tax payments. "The local laws covering our reception of food aid from abroad have made life difficult for us because of the imposition of sales taxes and service charges on food that is given free of charge and delivered at no cost," he said. Caritas, he added, had not informed its head office in Germany, or the European Union, that it was being taxed on donations. "We fear that if they knew about these taxes, they would stop giving us food aid, because they assume that the government would support us by removing barriers to what clearly is for the public good." He described the situation as "scandalous".

In the past, when consignments of food were received from abroad, Caritas sent appeals to the minister of finance requesting tax exemption on the grounds that the shipment was a donation, intended for humanitarian relief. Separate appeals had to be presented for every consignment, and the ministry then provided exemptions. This time, however, the Ministry of Finance is insisting that Caritas pay. Mohamed El-Yamani, general manager for research at the Ministry of Finance's Sales Tax Department, said that Caritas is also obliged to pay for the 12 consignments of sugar and oil received between 1993-1996.

He added that Caritas does not have to pay tax on beans, rice, pulses, protein biscuits and milk, since these commodities are not taxable by law. Sugar and oil, however, are subject to the sales tax.

There could be some ways to gain exemption, El-Yamani said. The minister of social affairs could appeal to the minister of finance to exempt Caritas by virtue of its status as an NGO serving the public good. Alternatively, if food was actually donated to the Ministry of Social Affairs, which could then pass it on to Caritas, taxes would not be imposed.

But according to Nabil Mohamed, deputy minister of social affairs for Cairo Governorate, the former course has proved unsuccessful. "We have done all we can; we have sent letters to the minister of finance asking that the tax be removed. They refused and said that the law is the law," he explained.

And Ali Abdou, the deputy minister for NGOs at the Ministry of Social Affairs, said that if Caritas arranged for its food aid to be donated to the Ministry of Social Affairs, it would be distributed among all non-governmental organisations, rather than just to Caritas.

Before the new sales tax was imposed by law in 1991, Caritas experienced no obstacles to the free entry of its food aid. The only other recipient of European Union food aid in Egypt, Secours Catholique (Catholic Relief Services), works under the auspices of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs because it is not registered as an Egyptian NGO. It has signed an agreement with the ministry which exempts it from customs and taxes. Other international development agencies operating in Egypt, such as USAID, are also exempt from customs and tax payments for humanitarian aid because of bilateral agreements and treaties signed with the Egyptian government.

Disabled students readmitted

Dozens of disabled students, who drew attention to their grievances with on-campus demonstrations, have been readmitted to Ain Shams University. **Reem Leila** reports

The government intervened last week in the case of a group of disabled students protesting their expulsion from Ain Shams University. The group had been dismissed on the grounds that their disabilities were not severe enough to qualify them for a university place with lower *thanawiya amma* grades than their able-bodied colleagues. The students, some in wheelchairs, others on crutches, had staged on-campus demonstrations to publicise their case.

Following the demonstration, Minister of Education Hussein Kamel Bahaeddin stepped in to address the students' grievances, establishing a medical committee to re-examine the 180 or so young men and women. Of these, 145 were reinstated either as regular, or external, students. The dismissal of 33 others was confirmed because they had presented papers claiming to be blind, but did not in fact suffer from any eyesight problems.

A Supreme Council of Universities decree defines a student as disabled if he or she is unable to completely depend on themselves and needs help to attend and follow the university courses. Students who meet this criteria are entitled to places in the faculties of arts, law or commerce without having to achieve the usual academic standard. The expulsions occurred when university officials decided to impose a stricter interpretation of the decree, excluding all but the most severely disabled students.

University President Abdel-Wahab Abdel-Hafez made it clear that the decree had been waived to reinstate the 145 students. "All disabled students were re-examined and allowed to re-enrol, regardless of the degree of their disability," he said. "Only those who do not suffer from any form of disability were dismissed."

Those suffering from slight disabilities were accepted as external students in one of the three faculties; the more severely disabled were given permission to re-enrol as regular students. Abdel-Hafez was satisfied with the outcome of the dispute and proud of what the university had done for the disabled students.

But in the view of Marwa Sami, a paralysed law student, readmittance was merely the restoration of a right that had been denied. "This is the least the government can do to provide for disabled students. I was not that happy. It was my right, taken from me, then returned. I really suffered."

Around 220 other disabled students were accepted by the university this academic year.

Obituaries

A great lawyer



Last week, Egypt and the Arab world mourned the death of a staunch advocate of public freedoms, who headed the Bar Association and the Arab Lawyers Federation for many years. **Aziza Sami** remembers Ahmed El-Khawaga

For 30 years, Ahmed El-Khawaga managed to steer the Bar Association along a unique path in national life. He succeeded both in representing the interests of lawyers and politicising the Association, allowing it to retain its distinctive dynamism at times when other civic institutions were reduced to a state of passivity.

When he died on 22 December of a heart attack at the age of 70, he was in his record-breaking seventh term as the organisation's head — the longest-standing leader ever. The longevity of his career has often been attributed to his pragmatism. But it was never the narrow pragmatism of sheer self-interest.

Through the changing needs and circumstances of three decades, and three political eras, he remained the quintessential leader — a brilliant, charismatic man who used his talents and capabilities to mobilise the Bar to become, and remain, a catalyst in public life.

Born in Al-Mahalla Al-Kubra in 1929, into a family affiliated to the nationalist Wafd Party, he joined the highly politicised Student Union during his university years, and graduated from the Faculty of Law in 1949.

He rose to political prominence under the late President Gamal Abdel-Nasser, becoming a member of the Arab Socialist Union and winning the Bar elections in 1966 to become the youngest leader in its history.

At a time when the activities of professional unions were restricted, the Bar Association took on a unique role among non-political organisations. He transformed it into an active body in line with Nasser's socialist policies, widening its membership to include public sector lawyers, upgrading its structure and securing independent funding.

In an atmosphere where the principles of pan-Arabism and non-alignment reigned, El-Khawaga forged contacts with the bar associations of other Arab countries, and led the Bar's delegations to non-aligned conferences. His strong contacts in this field led to his appointment as head of the Arab Lawyers' Federation in 1967, a position which he held until his death. In the turbulent days of the Arab boycott following the Camp David peace accords between Egypt and Israel, it was largely due to El-Khawaga's lobbying efforts that the Federation headquarters remained in Cairo.

A man who considered himself of the "the same generation as Nasser," there was no love lost between Khawaga and Nasser's successor, President Anwar El-Sadat. He was arrested in May 1971 during Sadat's Corrective Revolution, only to return with typical resilience after his release to sweep the Bar elections in 1978.

Throughout the 1970s, El-Khawaga led a strong Bar Association Council, representing an array of independent, Nasserist, Marxist and Wafdist groups. The council spearheaded opposition to the Camp David peace accords and clashed with Sadat over democracy and the Association's independence, which led to its being twice disbanded by Sadat. The Bar became the most powerful forum for the opposition in the '70s, criticised by Sadat for its politicisation, and commended by its advocates as a manifestation of democracy.

When El-Khawaga joined the new Wafd Party in the late '70s, it was not a renunciation of his Nasserist sympathies. His move, he explained, was motivated by nostalgia for the old Wafd — the repository of the democratic liberal influences which had formed his generation.

A fierce advocate of secularism till the very last, he took on the defence, over the past 10 years, of almost every case involving freedom of expression and liberal values. He opposed the banning of *One Thousand and One Nights* for alleged obscenity and was one of director Youssef Chahine's defence lawyers in the case brought against his film *The Emigrant*. He also defended university professor Nasr Hamed Abu Zeid, accused of presenting research which Islamist groups considered heretical.

He was prominent in controversial political cases. A lawyer for the defendants in the 'Egypt's Revolution' case which indirectly involved the son of the late President Abdel-Nasser, Khaled, he also participated in the defence of Soliman Khater, a soldier accused of killing Israeli tourists, and contested the trial of civilians in military courts in cases brought against the illegal Muslim Brotherhood organisation.

The last four years of his life were spent trying to resolve what may have been the greatest crisis in his career. The Bar was placed under sequestration at the beginning of 1996, ending a deadlock between the Brotherhood, who had gained a majority of council seats in the 1992 elections, and their opponents. El-Khawaga, still the Association's president, was appointed as one of its three sequestrators.

The crisis held deep personal implications for him. Not only did the Islamist takeover of the Bar, long-considered the bastion of liberal democracy, signal an interruption in its long-standing tradition, but the deep rifts inside the Association caused it to become, for the first time in its 84-year-old history, a non-player on the political scene, marginalised into passivity. This was anathema to El-Khawaga.

In the end, it became widely accepted across the political spectrum that El-Khawaga was the one man capable of steering the Bar out of its current impasse, because of his courage in confrontation, his bridges kept open with all, and his non-partisanship in times of crisis. With his death, the Bar has been left with an uncertain future.

His funeral last week was attended by thousands — political tigers of every stripe, from the ruling National Democratic Party (NDP) to the Wafd, from the outlawed Brotherhood to the left — in homage to a leader who never lost the bond of empathy, even with his foes.

Ahmed El-Khawaga died one day before his 70th birthday. He is survived by two daughters, Laila and Dina, and two grandchildren.

Pioneer journalist

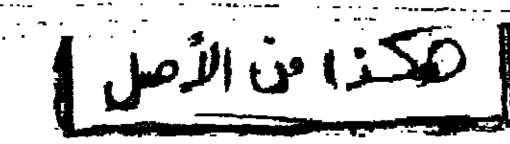
Hafez Mahmoud, a former chairman of the Press Syndicate and one of its founders, died of pneumonia last Thursday at the age of 80. The longest-standing syndicate member, Mahmoud was taken to hospital earlier in the day with bronchitis, which developed into pneumonia.

When the syndicate was established in 1941, Mahmoud became its secretary-general, a post which he held for over 20 years. Mahmoud's membership card for the syndicate, which includes about 3,000 journalists, carries the number one. The syndicate's first chairman was Mahmoud Abul-Fath, editor-in-chief of *Al-Masri*. Hafez Mahmoud was elected chairman in 1964 and served until 1967.

Mahmoud was imprisoned three times for his political views. He started writing for newspapers when he was 16. After graduating from the philosophy department of Cairo University, he formed his own newspaper with Fathi Radwan and Ahmed Hussein. In 1927, he met Mohamed Hussein Heikal Pasha, leader of the Liberal Constitutionalist Party, and was appointed a reporter on Heikal's newspaper, *Al-Siyassa*. By the age of 25, he was its editor-in-chief. At the time, *Al-Siyassa* was the most widely circulated newspaper in Egypt.

Mahmoud became editor-in-chief of *Al-Qahira* newspaper in 1953. In 1960, he joined the staff of the daily *Al-Gomhouria* and, following his retirement, continued to contribute articles to it and its sister publication, *Al-Massa'*.

In his twilight years, his eyesight became weaker and, as a consequence, his mobility was restricted. Yet the hindrances of old age failed to detract him from writing.



Library for the 21st century

AT A SIMPLE ceremony on Sunday, Mrs Suzanne Mubarak laid the foundation stone of a new Cairo University library which will be built over a 3,000-square-metre area at a cost of LE100 million, reports Rania Khallaf.

Construction of the state-of-the-art library will take up to three years and will be completed in time to usher the university into the 21st century. The six-storey compound will include audio-visual, microfilm and CD departments, a conference hall, a museum and a special section for manuscripts and old books. It will cater for 160,000 students enrolled in the university's 44 faculties and institutes as well as 12,000 teaching staff.

Moufid Shehab, the university's president, said the library, whose construction was made essential by the massive increase of information sources, will be linked to other national and international libraries, information networks and research centres. The government will contribute 50 per cent of the construction cost and the rest of the funding will come in the form of donations by Cairo University's Graduates Association, the Open Education Centre, businessmen and private sector companies.

At a meeting with the university's council and the board of the Graduates Association, Mrs Mubarak announced that the law regulating the activities of non-governmental organisations will be amended to make it easier for businessmen to make donations to public projects.



Shura Council debates democratisation

In a heated Shura Council debate, the government rejected opposition charges of restrictions on public freedoms. **Gamal Essa%, m El-Din** reports

Debates in the 264-member Shura Council — an Upper House that has no legislative powers — are usually subdued. But they heated up this week when opposition leaders accused the government of muzzling public freedoms and made demands for constitutional reforms. Rejecting the opposition's charges, government representatives insisted that the government is the democratically elected government "of all the people."

The exchange took place during the discussion of a 46-page report prepared by a special committee on the speech delivered by President Hosni Mubarak to a combined session of the Shura Council and the People's Assembly on 10 November. Specifically, the opposition leaders demanded the cancellation of the state of emergency and the amendment of the Constitution to give the People's Assembly the power to withdraw confidence from the cabinet and modify the state budget. The opposition leaders also urged the phasing out of what they called the "monopoly" exercised by the ruling National Democratic Party [NDP] over political life in Egypt.

Leading the anti-government diatribe was Mustafa Kamel Murad, head of the Liberal Party, who accused the government of using the emergency law to deny political parties the right to organise public rallies. "The emergency law even prohibits more than five citizens from gathering in one place," Murad said, adding that "this is why all the rallies organised by parties are held at their headquarters, which are surrounded by police forces outnumbering those who are present inside. How should anybody react upon seeing this large number of police forces and vehicles? I think they flee out of fear of being arrested."

According to Murad, the hallmark of true democracy is "listening to the other's viewpoint." In this context, he held Information Minister Safwat El-Sherif responsible for preventing leaders of the opposition parties from appearing on television. "People even accuse us of drumming up support for the government because our words, when we appear on television, are edited to give the impression that they are not so much different from the government's viewpoint. Not a single television seminar has hosted an opposition figure like me or Ibrahim Shukri [leader of the Islamist-oriented Labour Party]," Murad said. The remedy, he suggested, is for President Mubarak to attend the meetings held by opposition parties to "enrich political and democratic activities."

Murad also complained that opposition parties are cash-strapped. He suggested that the sum of LE10 million, out of the LE90 million which have been donated to the Shura Council by the defunct Arab Socialist Union, be allocated to opposition parties. "Publishing a newspaper now costs LE7,000 per day although we only get LE50,000 annually," he said. He added, "I have seen good democratic practices during the past 20 years of the multi-party system but, for me, the Arab Socialist Union was much better as a democratic forum."

Democracy, Murad said, will be achieved only when the emergency law is repealed, the 1971 Constitution modified to empower the People's Assembly to withdraw confidence from the government and the principle of "rotation of political power" seriously implemented. Journalist Sekina Fouad joined Murad in assailing the Information Ministry. She said the ministry falls short of "reflecting the principles of democracy and working to rebuild the mind and spirit of the people in a sound way."

Speaking for the government, Mohamed Zaki Abu Amer, minister of state for parliamentary affairs, responded that the emergency law does not bar opposition parties from organising public rallies. "Organising rallies is guaranteed to all at any time and in any place. If they are denied this right, this is because security authorities believe that these rallies might cause some kind of trouble," Abu Amer said. The incumbent government, Abu Amer added, "is not the government of the ruling NDP alone. It is the government of all the people, although it is formed by the majority party." As for the television's coverage of opposition party activities, Abu Amer stated that "we are in the age of the diversity of news sources. The Shura Council and the People's Assembly are two prime forums covered by television four days a week."

According to Abu Amer, the government has shown readiness in adopting the views of opposition parties and "much of the government's policy statement is in response to viewpoints expressed by the opposition." Abu Amer sees no need to amend the Constitution and argued that the "rotation of power" is achieved through the ballot boxes. Cabinet ministers are appointed "not necessarily because they are NDP members," he added.

Fikri Makram Ebeid, former secretary-general of the NDP, criticised Murad for praising the Arab Socialist Union (ASU). "Murad weeps over the ASU, which was a place for spying, or should we remind him of prisons, torture, coercion and sequestration?" Ebeid asked. He reminded Murad that even though the Liberal party is a small party that has failed to attract the people's interest, it publishes as many as 15 newspapers. "I took part in one of their rallies, which was attended by as many as 1,000 people, without any police intervention," Ebeid said.

Ahmed El-Sabahi, chairman of the little-active Umma party, suggested that legislation be passed to make it mandatory on every citizen to join a political party.

Rifaat El-Said, speaking for the leftist Tagammu party, said that "political pluralism and the multi-party system are not a gift bestowed on political parties." Instead, he focused his criticism on the New Delta project – the construction of an irrigation canal to carry Nile water from below the Aswan High Dam to a string of oases in the Western Desert. "I really fear that this project is merely a dream because its implementation was not preceded by the necessary scientific studies," El-Said said. The Ministry of Irrigation, he added, has not taken adequate measures to ensure the water supply for the new irrigation canal. Mohamed Sabri Mubada, a prominent lawyer, also expressed fear that no adequate scientific studies were conducted ahead of the implementation of the New Delta project.

Jail renewed for spy suspect

A Cairo court ordered an Arab-Israeli to be remanded in custody for an additional 45 days on charges of spying for Mossad. **Khaled Dawoud** reports



The Cairo northern court has refused to release Azzam Azzam, an Arab-Israeli held on spying charges, on bail, and has remanded him in custody for an additional 45 days. Azzam was arrested in Cairo in early November along with his alleged partner, Emad Ismail, an Egyptian national who has also been detained for a further 45 days pending trial.

Wearing jeans and sporting a beard, Azzam was surrounded by policemen as he arrived in the courtroom. He broke down in tears when he saw his two brothers and managed to hug them for a few seconds before the guards took him to the dock. Speaking in Arabic, Azzam told reporters he had received good treatment in jail. But he refused to answer further questions, and introduced his lawyer, Sherif Gharib, who works for the Israeli Embassy, as his spokesman.

Israeli consul Shukie Gabay appeared nervous in court as he was questioned by judge Ali Wahba. He stood immediately behind Azzam until he was asked to keep his distance by the guards.

In an emotional presentation in which he accused Israel of returning Egypt's sprint for peace with sabotage and spying, the prosecutor alleged that Azzam had used sex and money to recruit his Egyptian partner. He said Azzam had introduced his partner to two Israeli women of Arab origin — also charged in the case — who also worked for Mossad and who asked him to provide them with information. Azzam also provided Ismail with clothes which, when washed, produced a secret ink that could be used to send letters to Israeli intelligence, the prosecutor said.

Addressing the court, Azzam denied the charges and maintained that he had never joined the Israeli army or intelligence service. He was, he said, a mechanic working for an Israeli textile factory in Egypt. He insisted that the last time he saw Ismail was six months before his arrest and that he did not even know his Cairo address or telephone number.

Gharib, Azzam's lawyer, told the court that the 50 pages of investigation into the case did not contain a single shred of evidence incriminating his client, and demanded his immediate release. He claimed the last meeting between Azzam and Ismail took place in February and that there had been no further contact between them since.

The prosecutor demanded that Azzam be held in custody on the grounds that further investigations were necessary, and because he had no permanent address in Cairo. The judge turned down a demand by Azzam's lawyer to consider the Israeli Embassy as his Cairo address and release him on bail.

Since Azzam's arrest, several top Israeli officials and members of Shimon Peres' Labour Party have paid visits to Egypt to ask President Hosni Mubarak to release him. Israeli Defence Minister Yitzhak Mordechai told reporters after meeting Mubarak in the Red Sea resort of Hurghada last week that he had given the Egyptian president his "word of honour" that Azzam did not work for Israeli intelligence.

Mubarak said Israel had blown the matter out of proportion, adding that he could not intervene because the case was in the hands of the judiciary.

Egyptian officials denied reports that Cairo had delayed Azzam's trial in order to reach a deal with Israel to exchange him for a number of Egyptians held in Israeli prisons.

New clampdown on the Brotherhood

Prosecution officials deny that recent arrests of over 200 Islamist activists linked to the outlawed Muslim Brotherhood have political motives, reports **Amira Howeidy**

In wide scale raids, security forces this week arrested members of two 'underground' organisations affiliated to the outlawed Muslim Brotherhood in Cairo's industrial suburb of Helwan and nine provincial governorates. The first group, arrested last Thursday in Helwan, consisted of 48 Brotherhood members, some of whom are also members of the Islamist-oriented Labour party. They are charged with "affiliation to an illegal organisation."

According to the Interior Ministry, the second group, which calls itself Al-Qutbyoum — after the prominent Brotherhood leader Sayed Qutb who was executed in 1964 — is also affiliated to the outlawed organisation, as "it pursues the same guidelines and seeks to mobilise and recruit youth with the aim of penetrating various societal sectors." Two hundred of the Qutbyoum have been detained but have not been interrogated or referred to the State Security Prosecution (SSP).

According to SSP sources, the defendants of the first group denied their affiliation to the Brotherhood or to the material confiscated by the security forces. Some of them, however, did admit that they received some of the confiscated material from Labour party MP Ali Sayed Fath El Bab, "whose parliamentary immunity we are trying to lift in order to interrogate him," the source told *Al-Ahram Weekly*. He added that Fath-El Bab will be charged with leading the underground group and using the Labour party's headquarters in Helwan for illegal activities.

The confiscated material, according to the same source, consists mostly of typed literature in the form of articles on various issues such as: "The Role of the wives of political prisoners", "Focusing on faith in the syndicates", "Islam is the solution" and "How to come closer [to power] and perform the tasks of this stage." The hand-written material was referred to a forensic examiner to compare it with the handwriting of the defendants.

According to Hisham Saraya, the Attorney General for State Security, "all the defendants will be held in custody until the investigation is over. If the evidence we have becomes valid, they will be referred to trial." But according to Brotherhood defence lawyer Moukhtar Nouh, "the evidence is too weak to take the case to court." Neither the defendants nor the literature, he said, constitute an essential component of illegal activity. According to Nouh, 11 of the members of the first group are currently members of the Helwan local council and one of them, Ahmed Omar, is assistant secretary general of the Doctors' Syndicate.

Leaders of the outlawed Muslim Brotherhood expressed their astonishment at the arrests in interviews with *Al-Ahram Weekly*. They alleged the arrests were an attempt by the government to prevent the Brotherhood from contesting the approaching local council elections. Mustafa Mashour, the group's Supreme Guide, told the *Weekly*, "we have become accustomed to this kind of procedure before every election." The same thing happened before the '95 parliamentary elections, and many Brotherhood candidates ended up serving jail sentences instead of contesting the elections, Mashour claimed.

As for the group's intentions in the upcoming municipal elections, Mashour said that the Brotherhood will not contest the elections as an organisation, but "if some of our members wish to do so they can as individuals. The municipals are not viewed as very important."

Hisham Saraya rejected Mashour's claims. "We do not arrest people just like that. We received information from the Bureau of the State Security Investigations (SSI) which accused those individuals of practicing illegal activities. We will not be drawn into political discussions such as the upcoming elections," he told the *Weekly*.

To MP Fath-El-Bab, "the whole thing is not a surprise." The Labour party local council members have been very active in Helwan and have become a threat to the ruling National Democratic Party (NDP) in the coming elections. "Their services have made them very popular in such a poor area as Helwan. As an old member of the party, I gave them all the help they needed, using all my powers as an elected MP," he told the *Weekly*. "I got them licenses, permits and everything possible to help them do their work, and this, of course, did not please the candidates of the NDP."

Fath-El-Bab dismissed the possibility that the Parliament will submit to the State Security Prosecution's request to lift his immunity. "Besides the fact that the parliament is soverign, such a request, if complied with, would be unprecedented; the charges are too weak and far from serious enough to be considered by the Legislative Committee of the Assembly," he said.

Edited by **Wadie Kirolos**

The right to counsel

Awad El-Morr, chief Justice of the Supreme Constitutional Court, examines rulings governing the rights to legal representation



In Case No 6 for the 13th judicial year, decided on the 16 February, 1992, the Constitutional issue was the invalidity or otherwise of paragraph one of Article 15 of the law on the Bar promulgated by Law No. 17 (1983) which provides that ex-ministers, professors in universities and ex-counsellors of the judicial branch should not exercise the legal profession of counsel except before the court of cassation, appellate courts and the like, including criminal courts and judicial administrative courts. Paragraph two of the same article stipulates that the above prohibition shall not apply with respect to counsels inscribed before inferior courts on the enforcement of that law.

The petitioner, who was an ex-minister and at the same time a university professor, claimed that paragraph one of the challenged article contravened Articles 40 and 69 of the Constitution relating to the equal protection clause and the right of defence respectively. The base of his claim was that the prohibition contained therein was circumscribed to a particular class of lawyers despite their subjection to the same duties incumbent on their similarly situated counterparts. In addition, the Constitution entitles all litigants the right to freely choose counsels in whom they confide morally and professionally.

In striking down the challenged provision, the Court stressed that the Constitution outlined certain aspects of the right of defence as a prerequisite for the protection of all rights and freedoms, including personal liberty. Paragraph one of Article 69 thereof states that the right of defence either in person or by way of proxy is guaranteed. In furtherance of this, paragraph two of the same article stipulates that access of indigents to courts along with adequate means for their defence should be maintained. In addition, the mere appearance of a counsel before law enforcement officials deters improper tendencies and practices which might proliferate in the absence of adequate surveillance, especially in the pre-trial phase, and pervert the outcome of trial. Confessions are mostly made under coercion or deception. In view of such deviations, Article 71 of the Constitution was tailored to entitle the detainee or the arrestee the right to communicate with others in order to inform them of all that happened, and to have their assistance in the manner outlined by law. Evidently, such assistance shall necessarily include the right to have the advice of a retained counsel of the detainee's choice who would presumably help him in removing pending doubts and facing measures restricting his liberty. The Court also pointed out that in this context the detainee or arrestee shall not be barred from the right to communicate and consult with his councel in all matters that would prejudice his status either prior to or after investigation.

Under article 67 of the Constitution, the right to counsel has been envisaged as a basic requirement for deciding criminal charges with fairness essential to the very concept of justice, and in accord with the preservation of social order and fundamental rights and freedoms. The denial of that guarantee, the Court stressed, contradicts the presumption of innocence associated — from a Constitutional perspective — with mandatory procedural rules to ensure its effectiveness, including the right of the accused to be informed of the nature and cause of the accusation, to be confronted with the witnesses against him, and to have compulsory process for obtaining witnesses in his favour.

That presumption, which shall always stand unless a definitive conviction is rendered beyond reasonable doubt, is directly attached to the right to counsel, and viewed as the natural consequence of a balance that had been struck between the right to liberty on the one hand and the basic interests of society on the other. Criminal charges are associated with penal sanctions which would dramatically endanger the accused's right to a fair trial if his counsel failed to provide him with the needed assistance, or if communication with the counsel has been unduly suspended or denied. In particular, the right of the prosecution in the adversarial system of criminal justice to prove charges against the accused must be equalised and encountered with the accused's right to establish their voidness, either in form or substance.

In addition, the Court argued, the right of the accused to be heard will be meaningless in the absence of his counsel. Unlike experienced and learned counsels, laymen have no professional skill as to the precise implications of a rule of law which may appear to them intricate, complex and mysterious. Criminal charges are generally complicated, particularly in regard to the admissibility of evidence or its pertinence to the case. In such a situation the accused, if not effectively assisted by a retained or assigned counsel, will probably face a conviction upon irrelevant or inadmissible evidence or groundless allegations.

Article 69 of the Constitution which guarantees the right to counsel and the right of the impoverished to have the means for their access to courts transforms the principle of the subjection of the rule of law from a theoretical approach to its practical application, thus strengthening the social role which the judicature plays in the vindication of fundamental rights and freedoms. In fact, what matters as to the right of defence is not its being embedded in formalities but the substantive thrust deepening its effectiveness.

Therefore, denial of that right threatens the right to life along with that of human dignity, and even dismantles the very foundations of justice.

Apart from indigents who are not entitled, except to the services of an appointed counsel, to carefully advocate their interests, others who can employ one have a fundamental right to freely make their choices as to who will be their representative in a case or other critical situations. In fact this choice is the prerequisite for the establishment of a confidential relationship between the client and his counsel leading to mutual co-operation in all matters bearing on the outcome of the case, including the revealing of all related hidden facts of which the client has knowledge. Indeed, within such a reliable and trustful relationship, the counsel shall be prepared to take with due diligence and promptness the most serious decisions in defence of the interests of his client.

Given the fact that a workable guarantee of defence largely depends on the effective assistance with which a counsel provides his client, this right shall turn out to be hollow if the client was constrained to choose a counsel of less vision and experience, either with respect to his legal capabilities or the degree of importance with which he weighs his responsibilities. In the absence of a retained counsel possessing knowledge and expertise, effective assistance will be either a dead letter, or at best monotonous and lacking creativity. Furthermore, a retained chosen counsel shall endeavour to enhance the positive aspects of the legal profession whose veins are in need of a continuous flow of pertinent legal science, the Court affirmed.

The undisputed right to choose a prominent and distinguished counsel to defend all relevant points in a case — if denied — mirrors no justifiable legitimate interest, but simply implies discrimination against a specific class of counsels due to their past official positions, regardless of their knowledgeable coverage of different branches of law. Entrusted counsels attached in the past to particular official services have to appear before courts of inferior level in order to present thereto a well-established consolidated legal opinion securing the course of the case, and activating the prospects of a positive outcome, thus saving the client's time, reputation, efforts and money, the Court admitted.

Competent counsels and justices play an effective role in the proper administration of justice, and the preservation of ordered liberty. Adequate protection of rights and freedoms requires a counsel devoting his services in the interests of his client, and requires legislative removal of all limitations that would impede access to legal services including legal advice given or advocated by a counsel representing others in law suits and other circumstances.

The Court has long held the opinion that under Article 40 of the Constitution, equality before the law presupposes an absence of discriminatory treatment except for those in different circumstances. Against this principle, taken as the base for justice, freedom and social peace, the challenged provision barred a specific class of counsels from the same rights recognised to others with whom they are similarly situated. To base this discrimination upon past involvement in official services having no relevance to the proper exercise of the legal profession denotes arbitrariness. In the light of the above, the challenged provision has overstepped limitations prescribed by Articles 40 and 69 of the Constitution, and is therefore, the Court ordered, to be considered void and null.

MPs slam speculation boom

The impact of the revival of the capital market on the national economy was the focus of sharp criticism last week at the People's Assembly. **Gamal Essam El-Din** reports

A large number of MPs, businessmen, economic experts, owners of brokerage companies, and bankers gathered at the People's Assembly's Economic Committee last week to discuss the Capital Market Authority's (CMA) role in realising investment objectives, with special emphasis placed on the privatisation programme.

The discussions, which were part of hearing sessions held by the committee, focused on two prime issues. The first, said the committee's chairman Mustafa El-Said, was to gauge the extent to which the recent boom in the securities market has negatively affected the flow of direct investments into the national economy and deposits into banks. According to El-Said, although the rise of a strong securities market in Egypt last year is clear evidence of the privatisation programme's success and a major channel for profitable short-term investments, this nevertheless has negatively affected the flow of investments aimed at long-term projects.

The committee chairman posed two questions. First, whether the revenue of shares sold on the stock market is really being used to revitalise and restructure the companies that have been sold. And second, whether the high and quick returns on the shares of privatised companies has encouraged investors to play the market rather than focusing on investments.

"If investors, in their bid to realise the greatest profit, are focusing on the speculation and trading, then this means that the privatisation programme has sharply deviated from its prime objective of raising the national economy's productive capacity," he said.

Examples of this, stated businessman Mohamed Abul-Enein, an appointed MP, abound. Investors, he said, tempted by the current high returns on the shares of newly privatised companies, especially in the housing sector such as Medinat Nasr and Heliopolis Housing and Urbanisation, have abandoned value-added investments.

He cited an example of a businessman who cornered gains of LE15 million on investments of LE2.5 million placed on the capital market.

Another businessman, Abdel-Wahab Qouta, the committee's deputy chairman, estimated that around LE500 million are withdrawn weekly from banks and directed towards the purchase of securities.

But according to Abdel-Hamid Ibrahim, the CMA's chairman, the activity in the capital market has not negatively impacted on the flow of direct investments. "It is the boom in the capital market that opened the door for direct investments," he said. "The emergence of a flourishing and active capital market in a country is an essential catalyst for attracting local and foreign investments."

Ibrahim pointed out that the stock market capitalisation rose from LE4.7 billion in 1994, to LE11.8 billion in 1995 and to LE19.7 billion in 1996. This increasing value, he said, is not merely the result of speculation on these securities, but reflects the strong financial position of the privatised companies and the current stability of the Egyptian economy, as a whole.

Furthermore, noted Ismail Hassan, governor of the Central Bank of Egypt (CBE), the recent revival of the capital market has never adversely affected the level of deposits in the banking sector. He said that while individuals withdraw their deposits to buy shares, holding companies place the proceeds of the sale of these shares back in the bank.

Another issue addressed by the meeting were the priorities of foreign investors trading on the capital market. According to Mahmoud Mohieddin, professor of economics at Cairo University's Faculty of Economics and Political Sciences, most of the foreign investors coming to Egypt in the last period are looking at the short-term, seeking quick and high profits.

"This could greatly expose the Egyptian economy to a severe financial crisis because this kind of hit-and-run investors is the first one to run away from the market in case of any economic instability," said Mohieddin. He then called on the CMA's chairman disclose the names of foreign investors currently trading on the capital market.

In response, CMA's chairman Abdel-Hamid Ibrahim emphasised that CMA has detailed information on all foreign investors trading on the capital market. Although he refused to disclose the names of the foreign investors, he said the size of foreign ownership on the capital market is still too small to cause any negative impact on the national economy.

UNCC compensation awarded

THE GOVERNING Council of the United Nations Compensations Commission (UNCC) recently approved a fourth instalment of compensations. The instalment is aimed at covering over 70,000 claims filed by individuals who suffered losses up to $100,000 as a result of the 1990 Iraqi invasion of Kuwait. With this instalment of $637 million, nearly half of the 450,000 Category C claims filed with the commission have been resolved, bring the total amount of compensation awarded under this category to over $1.4 billion.

The council also approved the recommended award of $610 million, as verifiable costs, to the Kuwait Oil Company (KOC) for its $951 million claim relating to the costs it incurred in putting out oil well fires ignited by the Iraqis as they withdrew from Kuwait. The outstanding balance of the claim, said the council, will have to first be verified before being awarded. Other claims by the company, exceeding $3 million, have been rejected by the Council.

More than six years after an embargo was imposed on Iraq following its invasion of Kuwait, Iraqi oil can be exported again. During its last session the UNCC is to receive 30 percent of Iraqi oil export revenues (at least $100 million per months for a period of six months) within the framework of Security Council oil-for-food resolution 986 of 1995.

The UNCC confirmed that it was to pay out awards to successful individual claimants in categories A and C as soon as the resources are available in the compensation fund. Claimants are to be paid by instalments in the order in which there were approved.

To date, the total compensations awarded by the council add up to $5.25 billion.

Edited by **Ghada Ragab**

Market report

GMI stabilises

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Sun 22/12 | Mon 23/12 | Tue 24/12 | Wed 25/12 | Thu 26/12

AFTER four weeks of steady increase, the General Market Index began to level, gaining only 0.9 points and closing at 287.7 points for the week ending 26 December. While the number of total transactions slipped, the value of the trades increased from LE191 million the week before to LE249.7 million.

Leading the pack this week was the Heliopolis Housing and Urbanisation Company, which announced a 100 per cent coupon for its employees. Trading in its shares, which closed at LE430, accounted for 35 per cent of total market activity. Also in the spotlight, trading in shares of the Housing and Development Bank accounted for 13 per cent of the total number of shares changing hands. Shares of the Mohandes Bank register the greatest increase in value, gaining 44 per cent and closing on LE26 per share.

On the manufacturing sector, milling companies lost ground this week, with Middle Egypt Mills, North Cairo Mills and Bakeries and the Upper Egypt Mills company realising marginal gains of roughly three per cent. Shares of the Middle and West Delta Mills lost 3.2 per cent of their opening value to close at LE80.1. Also on the losing side were shares of the United Housing and Urbanisation Company, which decreased in value by 20.6 per cent to close at LE17.9 compared to LE23 at the start of the week.

Out of the 118 companies trading shares on the market during the week, the shares value of 49 increased, 36 decreased and 33 remained unchanged.

TRADE ® MARKS

1997 is expected to witness the continued resurgence of the Egyptian economy in the form of increased investment opportunities. As these investment opportunities continue to increase, so too will the number of new products and services available on the market. Within this context, it gives us great pleasure to present a new monthly feature, Trademarks, designed to keep you, the reader, abreast of the latest products and services which have arrived in Egypt. Trademarks will contain articles on products and services that will be of interest to businessmen and investors. And, in the What's New? column, you can learn about the most innovative product developments taking place around the world.

Introducing the world's smallest portable satellite telephone

BRINGING Egypt closer to the world of international, global voice, fax and data communications, the Environmental and Remote Services Centre has released Magellan's new microCOM-M satellite telephone system; the world's smallest, lightest and lowest-priced Inmarsat-M satellite telephone.

No matter where you are on the globe, you are never out of touch with Magellan's microCOM-M. You can pack the power of instant worldwide voice, fax and data communications in one very small package that literally fits inside your briefcase (weighing about 2.2kg), including the built-in antenna.

It is incredibly simple to use the microCOM-M; just connect to a 12 VDC power source, use the optional re-chargeable battery pack or AC/DC converter; unfold the unique hinged antenna, direct the unit to one of four Inmarsat-M satellites (with the help of the signal strength indicator), and insert the OGM Access Telecard and dial to any number anywhere in the world, from wherever you are.

The microCOM-M features the innovative OGM Access Telecard, giving customers immediate entry to the Inmarsat-M communications network at the time of the purchase. Using this "smartcard", you can pre-pay via credit card for calling time; no bills, no problems. It is plain and simple and remarkably advanced.

For more information contact Eng. Ihab El-Ghazzawi (from 9.00am to 5.00pm) at 2918330/2916344/670718.

GeoMAP offers solutions

GEOMAP Consultants has recently expanded its activities to cover the area of producing image maps and other geo-information using SPOT data for oil and gas exploration companies.

SPOT satellite images are most suitable and widely used worldwide for this purpose. Image maps produced using SPOT panchromatic and multispectral data provide the users in the petroleum sector with a valuable tool to use in their exploration activities.

As a leading company in the field of mapping and remote sensing, GeoMAP is already producing such geo-products to a number of oil and gas exploration companies including GNR and IEOC.

GeoMAP Consultants not only provides the produced maps in digital and hard copy formats, but also the original satellite images and the image processing software used to display and process the digital data.

Predicting disasters

Hussein Ahmed Younis
Head of the National Organisation for Remote Sensing

THE NATIONAL Organisation for Remote Sensing and Aerospace Sciences participated in a regional conference on using remote sensing to predict natural disasters. The project is being organised by the National Organisation for Remote Sensing in Syria with the cooperation of UNESCO.

Participating in the conference were a number of specialists in the field from Egypt, Jordan, Syria and Lebanon.

A study presented during the conference stressed the importance of using satellites to obtain data on natural disasters and to be able to guage their effects.

What's new?

Air safety through satellites

BRITISH experts confirmed that the year 1997 will witness a revolution in the safety systems of aeroplanes to put an end to the disasters that claimed the lives of 1000 persons this year alone.

Experts noted that new equipment will be used which will guarantee more safety by allowing the pilot to remain in contact with the ground crew who can verify the exact location of the plane. The new system will incorporate satellite networks to monitor to course of the flight. Additionally, use of this system will enable planes to fly a straighter route and thus decrease the flight time.

First Egyptian computer system

A GROUP of Egyptian electronic companies have agreed to manufacture the first Egyptian computer set.

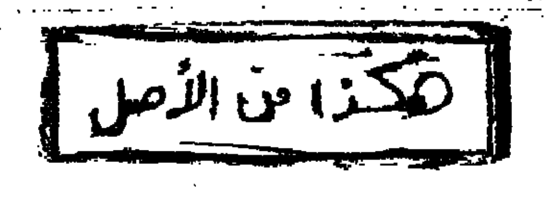
Engineer Mazhar Abdel-Hakim, chairman of Nasr Television and Electronics Company stated that feasibility studies indicate that the annual output can reach 50,000 sets.

This volume can be doubled according to the needs of the market and can be sold at competitive prices.

Tumour detection

WITHIN the past 3 years, nearly 3000 cases of tumours have been diagnosed in Egypt. To ensure accurate diagnosis, three tumour detection laser units were imported from the United States.

For effective implementation of the new equipment, doctors will receive training courses every six months in the United States and France on the use and maintenance of the equipment.





SIEMENS

أكثر من مجرد عميل ...

مع سيمنس أنت أكثر من مجرد عميل

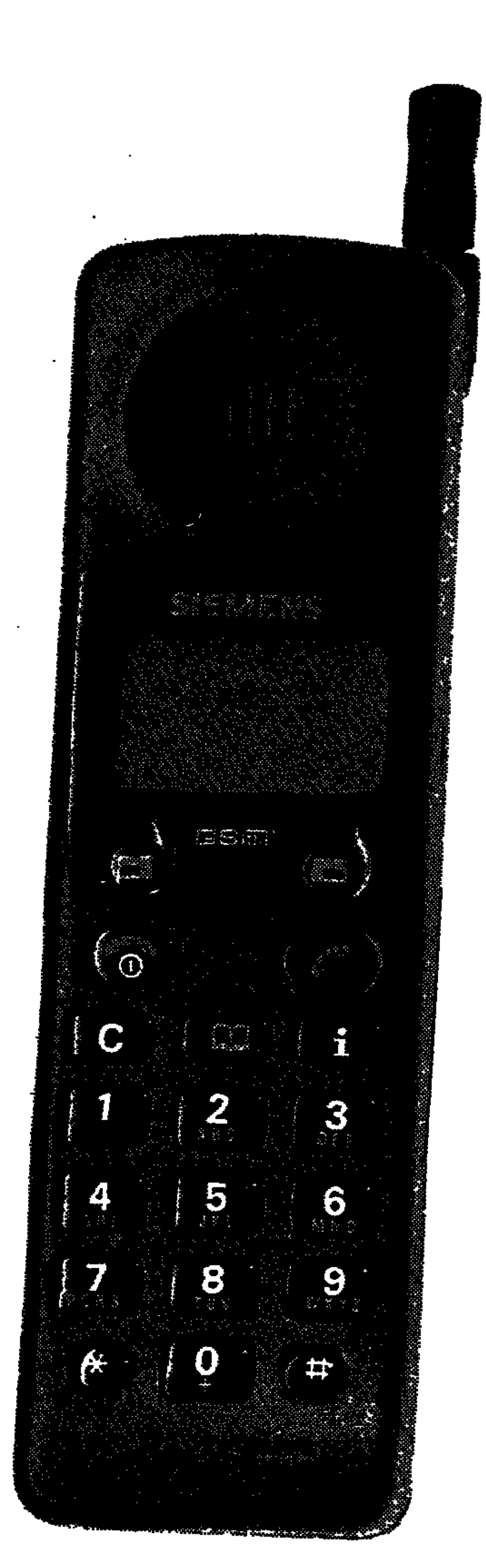
عندما تعلم من يقف وراء صيانة جهاز سيمنس

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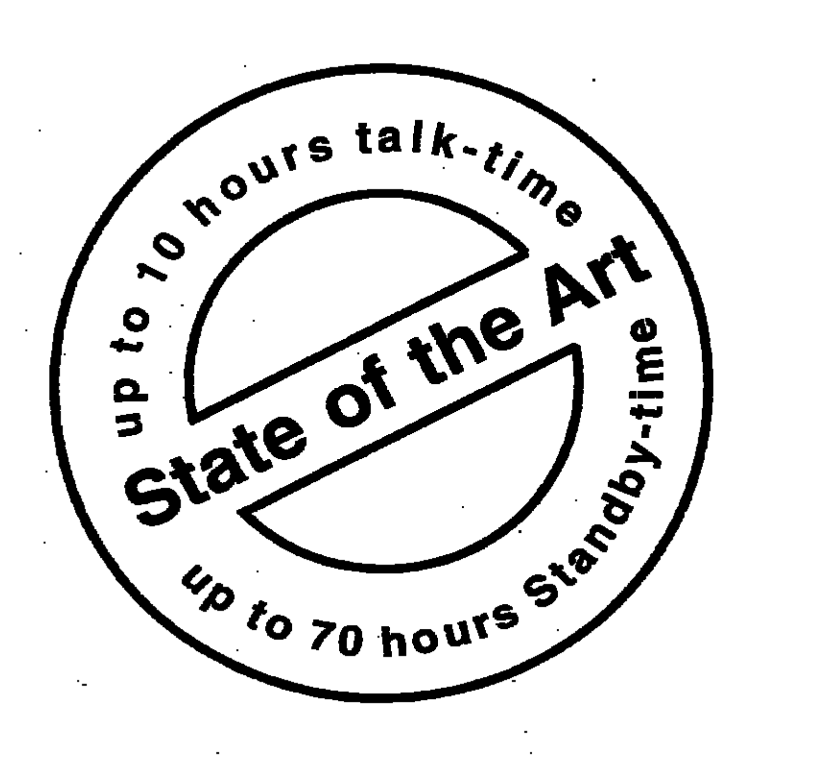
تليفونك المحمول

فستعرف معنى أن تكون عميل سيمنس

الاختيار لك ...



سيمنس ... عالم مختلف تماماً



الموزعون المعتمدون

الديار لأنظمة الاتصالات - القاهرة
تليفون : ٣٤٧٨٤٦٧/ ٣٣٧٦٧٥٧
شركة ICS تليفون ٢٤١٠٥١٤

اجيسكوم ش.م.م الاسكندرية
تليفون : ٥٤٦٦٠٢٢ (٠٣) الاسكندرية
٣٦١٣٩١٥/٣٦٠٧٢٩٥ القاهرة

شركة التكنولوجيا والتجارة (TNT)
تليفون ٥٧٥١٣٤٣/ ٥٧٤١٣٣٢
القلعي للتجارة والتوكيلات-الدلتا
تليفون وفاكس : ٢٢٥١١٦ (٠٥٠)

الموزعون

مركز النيل للتجارة الدولية
تليفون :٢٧٥٠٥٣٢
شركة ماترا تليفون : ٣٣٧٦٠٩٢

شركة اونست تريد
تليفون: ٣٤٦٩٤٥٥
الوليد للاستيراد والتصدير
تليفون وفاكس : ٣٤٨٩٧٢٤

شركة الروضة تليفون : ٢٧٠٩٠١٦
موسسة عماد السويدي للكهرباء
تليفون : ٢٩١١٦٣٣

منافذ البيع

جونة جروب تليفون : ٣٤٤٦٨٤٤
معرض بوش تليفون : ٤١٧٠٠١١
القاهرة للمبيعات تليفون : ٤١٧٥٨٥٥
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م/حازم سليمان تليفون : ٣٠٣٦٢٩٠
شركة القطيم تليفون ٣٩١٢٥٤٥
راديو طلعت تليفون ٣٩٠٠٧٨٠

وول اند فلور تليفون : ٥٠٦٠٠٠٠
سويت هوم تليفون : ٣٤٥١٧٣٠
معرض جاجوار تليفون : ٤٠١٧٣٢٩
معرض سيمنس للأجهزة المنزلية
تليفون : ٣٤٦٤٨٦٠ فاكس : ٣٤٤٦٥٣٥

شركة الاهرام للتجارة
تليفون : ٣٢١٥٥٦(٠٦٤) الاسماعلية
معرض جاجوار
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مكتبة خضير تليفون : ٣٣٦٥٠٦١

محلات mm

فرع محمد محمود (طلعت حرب)
تليفون : ٥٧٥٦١٥٥/٥٧٥٦٠٠٨
فرع الكوربة تليفون : ٤١٧٦٣٧١

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فرع العبور تليفون : ٢٦٣٦٦١٤
فرع روكسي تليفون : ٤٥٣٣٢٩٦

فرع مركز التجارة العالمي
تليفون :٧٦٠٤٧٨
فرع الزمالك تليفون : ٣٤٠٥٩٤٨

FOR MORE INFORMATION PLEASE CONTACT : MTI - TEL.: 4019131 / 4019132 FAX: 4018045



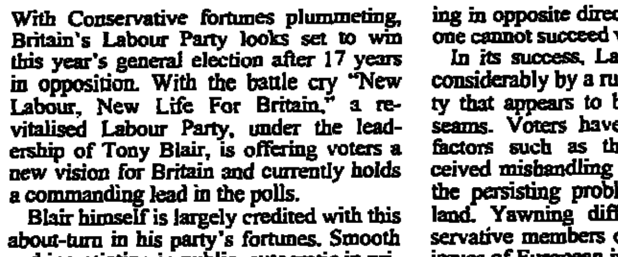


A good year for Labour?

1997 may well be the year the British Labour Party returns to power, ending 17 years of Tory rule. Party leader Tony Blair, in an exclusive interview with Yasmine Allam, outlines New Labour's strategy for winning the elections



Tory Prime Minister Major (left), and 1997's hopeful, New Labour leader Blair



With Conservative fortunes plummeting, Britain's Labour Party looks set to win this year's general election after 17 years in opposition. With the battle cry "New Labour, New Life For Britain," a revitalised Labour Party, under the leadership of Tony Blair, is offering voters a new vision for Britain and currently holds a commanding lead in the polls.

Blair himself is largely credited with this about-turn in his party's fortunes. Smooth and ingratiating in public, autocratic in private, Tony Blair has centralised power in a party often split by feuding and has broadened Labour's appeal, shifting the party towards the electoral centre and repositioning it as New Labour.

This repackaging is aimed at staking out the middle ground Labour needs to assure an election victory. Among the reforms introduced, New Labour has abandoned the cherished clause in its charter that championed public ownership and nationalisation and has dropped all references to a command economy. Within his party Blair has reined in left-wing members and trade unionists, whose behaviour in past elections scared away significant portions of the electorate. Blair is also eager to dispel his party's century-old image as the political arm of the unions and to woo the business and financial sectors away from their traditional distrust of Labour.

Throughout, New Labour has systematically singled out key points of attack for their campaign — many disconcertingly similar to Conservative proposals — targeting domestic issues considered by voters as being the most important facing Britain: smaller class sizes in schools, shorter waiting lists for treatment in the National Health Service, more jobs for the young and a stronger economy. This has earned Blair the charge that he is "out-Torying the Tories" in his bid to win the elections.

But Blair insists that all these changes, as well as his proposals for constitutional reform, are nestled within a larger organising vision: one that champions the role of a strong unified society and stresses the importance of understanding the social roots of prosperity and the state's role in tending them. According to Blair and his followers, community and enterprise are not pulling in opposite directions; on the contrary, one cannot succeed without the other.

In its success, Labour has been helped considerably by a ruling Conservative Party that appears to be falling apart at the seams. Voters have been disaffected by factors such as the government's perceived mishandling of the beef crisis and the persisting problems in Northern Ireland. Yawning differences among Conservative members of parliament over the issues of European integration and a single currency dispel any appearance of party unity. The leadership battles openly with its growing ranks of Eurosceptics, who fear closer links with Europe would erode national powers and eventually lead to a European superstate. So dismal are Conservative prospects that Prime Minister John Major last year lost his majority in the House of Commons.

But while Blair has every reason to feel confident, election victory is not a certainty. For one, the economy under the present government is experiencing a mini-boom fuelled by consumer spending, bringing back the so-called feel-good factor for the British population, which, in the 1992 elections, voted the Tories back in despite opinion polls pointing to a Labour victory. It remains to be seen whether people will put their confidence in Blair's vows to cut unemployment, boost education spending and tackle the welfare budget while keeping left and right on board.

Finally, there is Blair himself. Polls show that his leadership is a crucial factor in the party's enormous popularity. The question, therefore, remains whether the vision and vigour which Blair exudes are more a reflection of the person than the party. Labour must convince voters it is more than a one-man show.

How would you respond to the accusation that your chief aim is getting elected? In making New Labour attractive to a wider spectrum of voters are you not compromising on original Labour principles?

Getting elected is not a bad aim for an opposition party to have! Labour has been out of power for 17 years, so we are determined to win the election next year. But appealing to more people does not mean that we have become unprincipled. It means our principles are being applied to the modern world. Some of our critics seem to say that we can either be principled and unelectable, or unprincipled and electable. I completely disagree. I believe that you can have a sensible electable left-of-centre party governed by decent values.

The fundamental changes in New Labour are not about positioning or just winning the next election. My aim has been to create a new progressive force in British politics — a party that can break away from the class-based politics of the 1940s and the pressure-group politics of the 1970s and 1980s, and bring about radical change in British society. That is why the Labour Party has changed fundamentally in the last two years, with the creation of New Labour. We have rewritten our constitution to put a commitment to enterprise and the private sector alongside that of social justice. By the time of the next election our membership will have doubled since the last election. We have put our programme for government to a vote of all our members and had it endorsed by 95 per cent. And the process of reform and change is continuing.

My values are simple. They are centred on a belief that we achieve more together than we achieve alone and on the need for a strong cohesive society to back up the efforts of individuals. The key to the success of the new left of centre is our understanding that social cohesion and economic growth are not somehow opposed to each other but require each other. A fractured society is not only morally wrong but also economically inefficient. The costs of crime and a large class of people set apart from the mainstream act as a drag anchor on the economy.

But we seek to tackle these problems in a way relevant to today, not the past.

You appear to have effectively diminished the power of the trade unions in your party. Is opposition from the left destroying party unity and could this hamper the effectiveness of a Labour government?

The relations with the trade unions have been put on a different footing and brought up to date. [Parliamentary candidates] are now selected by ordinary party members rather than by small union-dominated committees. The share of the vote which unions control at our party conference has been reduced. And ordinary trade union members now vote in leadership elections rather than block votes being cast by union leaderships. But far from these changes being vigorously opposed, there has been huge support for change from party members and trade unionists.

The British economy is one of the strongest in Europe. Could the economy keep the Conservatives in power?

It is true to say that Britain is no longer in recession, and we are proud of our successful British companies, but it is easy to exaggerate the strength of the economy. There are fundamental weaknesses in relation to the skills base and investment levels.

We cannot ignore the fact that we are 42nd in the world education league, with productivity levels still well behind those of France and Germany: ninth in the table of European living standards; and carrying a level of public debt that has doubled since 1990, so that we pay out each year in interest charges almost as much as we spend on law and order and defense. A new Labour government's task is not to change what has worked, but to put right what hasn't; to prepare and equip the British people and business for the future.

The best way to raise productivity and job opportunities is to enhance the employability of our people. That means education skills and technology. And it means reform of our welfare system to encourage work and to provide incentives for self-improvement.

Where do you stand on the question of Europe? Do you share any of the Conservatives' Euroscepticism?

I believe unequivocally that it is in Britain's interest to be part of Europe. The large and growing part of the British Conservatives and their allies that want Britain out of Europe are playing dangerous games with our national interests, under the pretence of advancing them. I also believe unequivocally that it is in Europe's interest that Britain is there as a strong and persuasive partner.

We can help fashion the new economic agenda that Europe needs for the 21st century, but only if we are seen as a constructive partner in Europe, properly engaged and playing our full part.

I will stand up for Britain's interests, wherever they are threatened, in Europe or elsewhere. If I believe disagreeing with our partners is the correct course, I shall do it. But I shall not seek isolation for its own sake. And I am pleased to say that there is no significant element in my party that wants me to. I believe we can offer a fresh start in our relations with Europe.

We have a positive agenda we want to pursue in Europe. I have proposed that we set a deadline of the end of the British presidency [of the European Union] in June 1998 for full completion of the single market. We need in particular to address continuing blockages in telecommunications, financial services, gas and electricity and public procurement. We want to proceed rapidly with enlargement negotiations to include the countries of central and eastern Europe. If we want to underpin these fragile democracies we have to open up our markets to their goods. These negotiations should start under the British presidency.

We also want a Europe that is open to trade. We do not believe there is any future in sheltering behind overt or covert protectionist barriers as the extreme right argues. Protectionism ends at best in less trade and at worst in war. Under our presidency we will use the second European Union-Asian meeting to ensure greater openness and remove non-tariff barriers. The Tories are tearing themselves apart on Europe. They are incapable of getting the best deal for Britain because their party is split from top to bottom and has become ungovernable.

When do you think the pound will be incorporated into a common European currency?

We have made it clear that in principle we can see advantages in favour of a single currency — stability in exchange rates and lower interest rates — and we have also made it clear that, unlike the Conservatives, there is no insuperable constitutional or political objection to it.

The decision on British participation will be taken on the basis of the economic arguments at the time. We will need convincing that the economic conditions will allow it to succeed. For a currency union between nations to work there needs to be genuine and sustainable convergence in the way their economies perform and in the way they react to external shocks. Otherwise, with exchange rate adjustments no longer possible and only limited scope for adjustment through labour migration or fiscal transfers, the risks of countries finding themselves saddled with the wrong policies are too great.

Until these issues are resolved we will keep all our options genuinely open. We are also clear that if we do make a decision to join the single currency then it can only happen with the full consent of the British people through a referendum.

What is your response to the numerous comparisons that have been made between you and US President Bill Clinton?

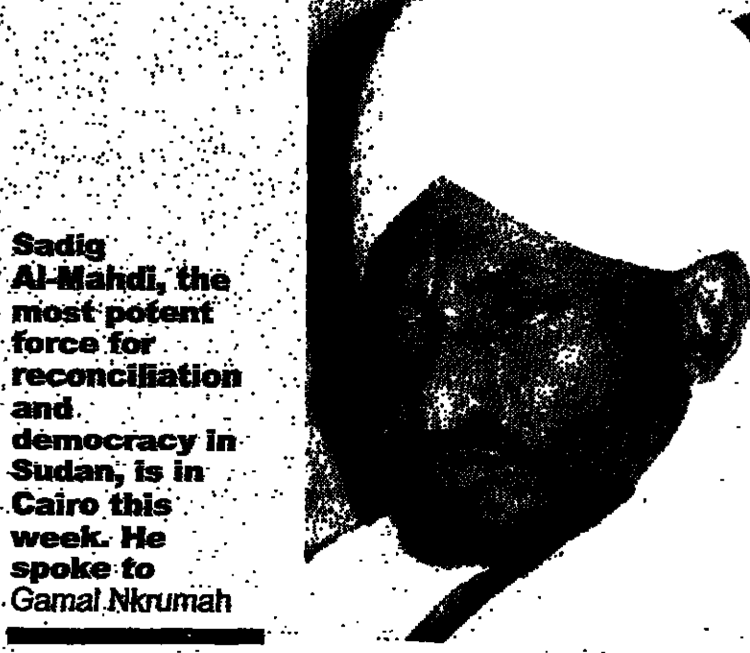
I believe that any comparison between politicians of different countries should not be taken too seriously, but it is certainly true that Labour is not alone in the process of change. Politicians on the centre and centre left are facing the same challenges everywhere: to create opportunity and security for all our people in a world of change.

Bill Clinton and the New Democrats in the US are showing how economically and electorally successful this approach can be. We are on the verge of a new progressive era. The tide of ideas is flowing back in our favour. When parties of the centre and centre left occupy the middle ground they are winning elections around the world. And we are helped by a governing party where leadership is being dragged further and further to the right.

Are you confident that your comfortable lead in the polls will hold in the run-up to the elections?

Polls go up and polls go down. I don't pay much attention to them. And I fight a constant battle against complacency in my party. What is clear is that people are fed up with the Conservatives because of their incompetence and their betrayal on taxation since the last election. Labour has to show that we deserve the people's trust and we will fight until the election both to expose the Tories' record and to win the people's trust.

Mahdi in fighting form



Sadig Al-Mahdi, the most potent force for reconciliation and democracy in Sudan, is in Cairo this week. He spoke to *Gamal Nkrumah*

The most potent symbol of reconciliation between Arabic-speaking, Muslim northern Sudan and non-Arab, largely non-Muslim southern Sudan was the meeting a couple of weeks ago between John Garang, leader of the Sudan's People's Liberation Army (SPLA) and Sadig Al-Mahdi. The latter, the Umma party leader and former Sudanese Prime Minister, is on a ten-day visit to Egypt, the first to the country since his escape from house arrest in Sudan three weeks ago.

Egypt is the third country Al-Mahdi visited after a two-week stay in Asmara, the Eritrean capital, and a brief visit to Addis Ababa, the capital of Ethiopia and site of the headquarters of the Organisation of African Unity (OAU). Sadig Al-Mahdi, Sudan's first and last popularly elected prime minister, was overthrown in a bloodless military coup d'état in 1989 engineered by his brother-in-law, the current Speaker of the Sudanese Parliament and leader of the National Islamic Front (NIF), Hassan Al-Turabi. Wisal Al-Mahdi, Turabi's wife, is Sadig Al-Mahdi's sister.

A direct descendant of Mohamed Ahmed Al-Mahdi, the Mahdi of historical fame, Sadig is a tall and broad-shouldered man with a decidedly regal bearing. His genial countenance belies his age and his billowing white robes and turban contrast sharply with his henna-red stubble beard and sharp features, those of an ancient Egyptian pharaoh.

The Umma Party has traditionally been known to be less sympathetic to Egypt than other Sudanese political parties such as its main rival the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP). The DUP leader, Sheikh Othman Al-Mirghani, is also in town and Sadig paid him a courtesy call at the DUP headquarters in Cairo. On the second day of his visit to Egypt, Al-Mahdi met with senior Egyptian officials, including Foreign Minister Amr Moussa and top presidential political advisor Osama El-Baz. Can Sadig explain the importance of his visit to Egypt at this particular historical moment? "From the very beginning of the Egyptian Revolution of 1952, it became clear to us [in the Umma Party] that Egypt was determined that the Sudanese people be given the right to national self-determination. With this realisation on our part, all previous reservations about Egypt were dropped. Today, we enjoy a healthy working relationship with Egypt," Sadig told *Al-Ahram Weekly*.

"As we are in Cairo, let me emphasise that Sudanese and Egyptian national security are organically linked. Egypt's political and economic well-being is essential for Sudanese political and economic well-being, and vice versa. The strategic interests of the two countries are inextricably intertwined," Al-Mahdi said. Rumours are flying about that Egypt is reluctant to assist the Sudanese opposition forces because of fears that the military defeat of Khartoum in southern Sudan would trigger off a chain of events that could lead to the splitting of Sudan into two states — North and South Sudan. There are those who argue that Egypt can secure better access to Nile water if Sudan is a unified political entity. Egypt, therefore, is reluctant to fully back the Sudanese opposition umbrella organisation, the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) and especially the SPLA. Egypt has also objected to the proposed United Nations arms embargo against Khartoum for the same reason.

Three unforeseen events have taken place in Sudan within the space of a month: Sadig Al-Mahdi's escape from Khartoum; the kidnapping of Red Cross employees by a breakaway southern rebel group and their rescue by an ambitious American Congressman who subsequently became America's ambassador to the United Nations and an unprecedented combined attack of opposition forces — northern and southern — on government installations in northeastern Sudan near the Eritrean border.

Meanwhile, the United States ambassador to Sudan, Timothy Carney, normally resident in the Kenyan capital of Nairobi, visited Asmara and met with Sudanese opposition forces, including Sadig Al-Mahdi. Carney later flew to Khartoum where he met Sudanese government representatives. Carney also met Riek Machar, leader of the South Sudan Independence Movement, and former deputy president Abel Alier.

Sadig flatly denies the charge that America had a hand in his escape. "All preparations for my escape to Asmara were thought out and implemented by Sudanese people, in particular by fellow Umma Party members. Nobody knew of our escape from Khartoum and arrival in Asmara except for a handful of Umma Party members," Al-Mahdi stated. Al-Mahdi explained that he escaped in a convoy of cars comprising 25 of his relatives and close associates in the Umma Party and headed by his son Abdel-Rahman. He fled the country through a route stretching north some 500 kilometres and crossed the border at the Eritrean town of Tasanay. "The journey across northeastern Sudan was very pleasant. Everyone was relaxed and we stopped to take photographs along the way," Al-Mahdi said.

Congressman Bill Richardson of New Mexico was the leader of a rescue mission that secured the release of a US citizen and several other hostages who were abducted by a breakaway faction of the SPLA. The splinter group, headed by Kerubino Bol, has been engaged in bitter fighting with the mainstream SPLA group headed by John Garang. On 7 December, an International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) plane was on its way from the ICRC hospital in Lokichokio with an American citizen, John Early, an Australian, Marce Worthington, a Kenyan national of Indian origin, Mohsin Raza, and five Sudanese on board. The authorities in Khartoum say that the five Sudanese are southerners and members of the SPLA.

The ICRC plane was forced to land on territory held by Kerubino Bol whose forces control wide areas of Bahr Al-Ghazzal. The hostages were taken to the town of Wunroc, in the Bahr Al-Ghazzal Province. Bol, an ethnic Dinka like Garang, lost a daughter to cholera — a disease that has ravaged the area. At first he demanded $100 million in damages. Later, he asked for a $2.5 million ransom, but Richardson bargained hard and Kerubino was forced to accept a package based on humanitarian assistance: rice, three land cruisers and a promise to conduct a water and sanitation survey.

There is much talk about Richardson's bid to make big political capital out of the episode. "A genuine American hero," said Daniel Spiegel, America's Permanent Representative to the United Nations in Geneva. Indeed, Richardson has been nominated to succeed Madeleine Albright as US ambassador to the UN. The Sudanese government has long complained that the ICRC provides material and logistic support to the SPLA. Khartoum alleges that ICRC planes transport SPLA troops from Uganda and Kenya into southern Sudan and between different garrison towns and battle zones in southern Sudan itself. Khartoum claims that the recent grounding of the ICRC plane as it carried five southern fighters is proof that the ICRC fully backs the SPLA.

On Saturday 28 December at 2.30pm local time, SPLA forces in conjunction with the Beja Congress and the New Sudan Brigade (NSB) — all three groups are aligned under the National Democratic Alliance — inflicted heavy blows on Sudanese government forces in the largely ethnic Beja-inhabited area of Hameshkureb, in Kassala Province, northeastern Sudan. The location of the fighting was only some 30 kilometres away from the Eritrean border. According to SPLA sources, the toll of the skirmishes between government and opposition forces, who fought under the code name Dordeb Tigers, resulted in 50 dead and 120 injured in the ranks of the government troops. The Dordeb Tigers managed to get away with armoured cars and other vehicles in good working condition.

The following day, the Dordeb Tigers shot down a government military helicopter and arrested three members of the NIF militias: Mohamed Ahmed Omar, an ethnic Hausa; Abdu Babiker Mohamed, a NIF Popular Defence Forces member from Dar Fur and Hassan Abul-Rahman Mohamed, also from Dar Fur. One Dodeb Tiger was captured by the government, Laurence Lado Kai, an ethnic Kuku from southern Sudan. The Hameshkureb skirmishes represent a new phase in the armed struggle against the NIF regime in Khartoum.

In the early hours of Tuesday 8 October, the first ever combined attack by the three groups had taken place. Al-Wathiq Kamir, a Cairo-based member of the NSB told the Weekly that, "the importance of the attack is that it was the first time that a combined force of the NDA and the military wing of the Beja Congress, the NSB, and the SPLA joined forces to do battle inside Sudan. In the past, there were separate attacks by either the SPLA or the Beja Congress." He added, "The co-ordinated military venture was a mechanism that facilitated unity among disparate Sudanese opposition forces, northern and southern. It helped to bring together all groups that believe in the unity of Sudan." The NDA's military committee is headed by Garang.

On that occasion, Sudanese opposition forces had attacked the garrison town of Togan 60km northeast of Aroma, a provincial backwater town in northeastern Sudan near the Eritrean border. The skirmishes lasted for a couple of hours and was confined to the garrison itself. The civilian population was not affected. "It was purely a Sudanese affair — 100 per cent. No Eritrean forces were involved," insisted Yasser Arman, SPLA representative in Asmara. "In Aroma, 15 government forces were killed and 20 wounded and a land cruiser vehicle was destroyed," Arman told the Weekly. "There are two important facts: the SPLA are seasoned in guerrilla warfare and the ethnic Beja have a deep knowledge of the geography of the area," Kamir added.

The Beja Congress, formed in 1958 by Sheikh Taha Mohamed Taha, reemerged as a political force last year. It is said to have very close links with Asmara. Eritrea broke off diplomatic relations with Khartoum in December 1994. Earlier support by some of Sudan's neighbours, including Eritrea, to the regime in Khartoum has been whittled away. The NDA has since convened two conferences in Asmara in June 1995 and January 1996.

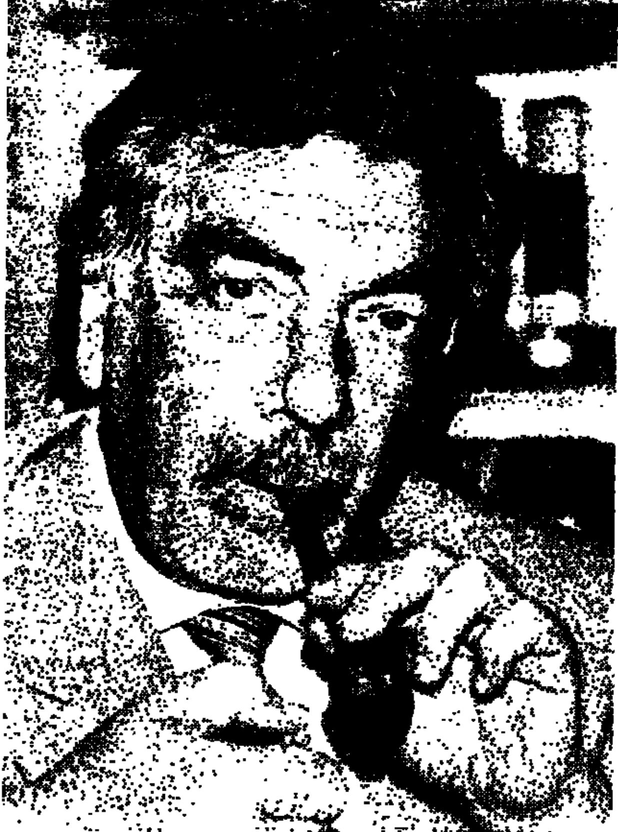
"The war in the South poisons Sudan's relations with other African countries and tarnishes the country's image abroad," Al-Mahdi explained. "The authorities in Khartoum have made it crystal clear that they aim at spreading their own brand of Islam by force in neighbouring African countries. The regime has become a nuisance to Sudan's neighbours. The entire region recognises the danger that the regime poses. Neighbouring countries are wary of the regime because of its support of various terrorist groups. The regime also poses a serious threat to Sudanese national security and to the security of the entire northeast region of Africa. Our relations with our neighbours have been ruined," Al-Mahdi said. "The regime has embarked on a jihad against our non-Muslim brethren in southern Sudan and threatens to annihilate the southern Sudanese people and export its ideology to the entire region. If it succeeds in doing so, then this model of intolerance and tyranny would engulf the region. Genocide, racial hatred and religious bigotry will follow in its wake," he added.

"The regime hoists high Islamic-sounding slogans which are a cover for all sorts of atrocities and evil going-ons. It is a can of worms. The regime is a cancer that must be excised before it spreads abroad. We, the Sudanese opposition, therefore have two-fold responsibilities: to topple the regime and to rid the region of the NIF and other Islamist zealots," Al-Mahdi said.

Al-Mahdi can no longer be accused of foot-dragging over the issue of self-determination for the southern Sudanese. He told the Weekly that the ferocity of the war in southern Sudan has brought matters to a head. "It is high time that a decision concerning self-determination for the southern Sudan be made. Only a referendum in southern Sudan could establish once and for all if Sudan is to remain a single political entity," Al-Mahdi stated.

Al-Ahram Weekly talks to two senior Middle East political analysts about two of the most significant regional developments of the past twelve months, and prospects for the next

The impossible status quo



In the last year the peace process has been turned on its head as Netanyahu has painted himself into an increasingly untenable corner. What next? **Eric Rouleau** on the prospects for peace or otherwise

"1996 witnessed a number of significant events with regards to the ME peace process. The year began with Palestinian elections, important for a number of reasons, not least that this was the first time Palestinians had had the opportunity to express their political will in relatively free elections. The elections also served as a popular referendum on the political line that Yasser Arafat has been following for some time — i.e. recognising the state of Israel and directly negotiating with it. No matter how tortuous these negotiations have been, and granting they have been characterised by an unequal relationship between the two parties, the elections showed that the Palestinians had accepted that they had no other way to reach their legitimate objectives. There is no doubt that the election results displayed massive acceptance of what seems to be Mr Arafat's political line.

"There can be little argument that May's Israeli parliamentary elections constituted a watershed event in the peace process. In effect the elections destroyed the peace process, at least in as much as it had been envisaged since the Madrid negotiations in 1991 and continued in the Oslo agreements. Whether one agrees or not with Oslo, and there is a lot to disagree with in Oslo, the one positive thing is that Israel was made to admit, perhaps hypocritically, that it would have to give up territories in return for peace with the Arabs. But with the arrival of Likud to power this simple land for peace formula has been turned on its head. Another casualty of the Likud victory was the emphasis that had been given to economic relations with the Arab world by Netanyahu's predecessor, Peres. And no matter how idealistic was Peres' vision of economic cooperation, it was at least symbolic of his government's will to exist with Arab states on some equal footing.

"The meeting between the Syrians and the Israelis, which took place in the US in February, constitutes another important development. At the time we did not know much about the meeting beyond the fact that both sides were making optimistic noises. At the time the Israeli spokesman talked about Syria as being a credible state, and later we learned that for the first time the Israeli government pledged itself, in front of American witnesses, to withdraw completely from the Golan Heights. Until the meeting the Israelis had simply played with words, content to issue ambiguous statements about partial withdrawal, as if they had not realised that reaching any agreement with Syria would be impossible without a firm commitment to returning the Golan Heights.

"Syrian representatives at the meeting announced that Syria would consider the possibility of concluding a peace agreement with Israel in return for complete withdrawal from the Golan Heights. And while the exact details of what went on at the meeting were not made public at the time, we now know that the two sides were close to agreement. Yet the fact that the agreement was negotiated in secret gave Netanyahu the pretext to renege on any agreements reached.

"The election of Jacques Chirac to the French presidency has also carried ramifications for the region as 1996 witnessed the beginnings of what looked like a Gaullist policy of a French independent position vis-à-vis the Middle East. Certainly in the speech he delivered at Cairo University Chirac outlined a vision of the future of the region that diverged massively with American plans.

"The visit of the French foreign minister to the Middle East in April served to further underline the position of the French government. The Americans were antagonistic towards his presence, and US Secretary of State Warren Christopher refused to see him, even though he was talking to President Assad, in an attempt to get Damascus to water down its demands, and to the Iranian Foreign minister, Mr Velayati, asking him to exercise a moderating influence on Hizballah.

"In the end the US was forced to admit that it was thanks to the French foreign minister that some agreement was reached with Hizbullah. And however trying this experience has been, it serves to illustrate the will of the French government in addressing the situation in the Middle East, regardless of whether this pleases or displeases Washington.

"When the Iraqis went into Kurdistan the French government did not agree at all with the American position, and made its disagreement public, insisting that Saddam Hussein was moving Iraqi troops inside Iraq, an act that could not possibly justify the imposition of further sanctions. As a consequence the French government refused to associate itself with American actions against Iraq.

"French withdrawal from Operation Provide Comfort is now very much on the cards. The belief in France is that the Kurds do not need Western protection. Talabani is allying himself to Iran, Barazani to Iraq, and both are enemies of the US. So who are we supposed to be protecting? It would be stupid to say we are protecting the Kurds.

"In fact, one can argue that 1996 saw the final collapse of the Gulf war coalition. The US is now the sole protector of what it perceives as peace and stability in the Middle East."

PROSPECTS FOR PEACE: "The Oslo peace process has been virtually destroyed. I say virtually because the Netanyahu government does not dare to say that it will not implement the Oslo agreement. It is an agreement that has been accepted and ratified by the Israelis, the Palestinians and the whole world. Whether or not Netanyahu likes it he is obliged to say that he will implement it yet his interpretation of what this implementation means has in fact destroyed the agreement.

"Whatever was positive about the Oslo agreement — and here I am thinking of the principle of land for peace, ie the possibility that the Palestinians will be able some time to establish their own state in the West Bank and Gaza — has been undermined by Netanyahu. Such a possibility has clearly vanished given the election of a government happy to fund new settlements. What we can expect, and what we are already seeing, is an increase in the number of settlers, which of course leads to an increased possibility of the creation of Bantustans.

"There are those, Netanyahu, naturally, among them, who point out that the Likud government is in effect simply continuing the settlement policies of its Labour predecessor. And though I partially agree with this view, in the final analysis I think it is wrong. Labour, after all, has undergone considerable changes since the time of Oslo, when it was run by hawks and Rabin was doing practically the same thing as Netanyahu. Yet by the time of his death Rabin had himself changed, having discovered that he could not avoid making concessions to the Palestinians.

"Labour, in any case, never created new settlements. They limited themselves to expanding existing settlements, and 99 per cent of this took place in the Jerusalem area. Netanyahu, though, has declared his commitment to creating new ones. This is a fundamental difference between Likud and Labour. Likud says this land is ours. This land is Jewish. The Labour party neither says that nor believes it. Likud on the other side, never said that they will give up this land, and this is why they have such a problem with the land-for-peace formula. So let us not confuse things: Labour has been changing and is capable of changing. Likud is not.

"Even more important is that the Labour government always said that settlements would be subject to negotiations — in other words, withdrawal from the settlements would follow an agreement. There were even rumours, indeed more than rumours, about secret talks between the Palestinians and Israelis, in which land was being bartered.

"The point of all this is to show that there was at least some kind of dialogue, which meant that the Israelis accepted, at least implicitly, that settlements were not to be there forever and ever, and that some kind of political agreement would have to be reached. Things were progressing, albeit slowly, in that direction.

"For Likud there is no question that settlements be moved anywhere. It is all Jewish land, good Jewish land.

"There are also important differences between the constituencies of the two parties. The Labour party's constituency had been pressurising Rabin to make concessions to the Palestinians, something Likud's constituency is never going to do. So Palestinian negotiators had some hope in dealing with a Labour government, particularly given the direction in which the peace camp was moving.

"While those who say there is not that much difference between Likud and Labour are not absolutely wrong they do lack vision, since things have to be judged in terms of what the Labour government was heading for and what the Likud is now heading for. In this dynamic sense they are going in opposite directions.

"But to return to the most important issue — prospects for the Middle East peace process in 1997. While predictions are always risky it is inconceivable that the present situation can continue unchanged indefinitely.

"Take things from the Israeli point of view: there is an economic crisis which is developing very rapidly in Israel, a general strike has been taking place for the past three or four days now, and one of the reasons for this crisis is the fact that the peace process has ground to a halt. Normalisation with Arab countries is now in jeopardy, which is having a deep impact on the economy, not only because some Arab governments (like the Omani government) have stopped dealing with the Israelis, but because the whole atmosphere is not conducive to investment. Investors — and this applies to both foreign and local investors — are not investing anymore because they have no faith in the peace process in the area.

"The business community supported the Labour party, and were pushing the Labour party for more concessions because they wanted to do business with the Arabs, an impetus that has now been lost.

"Netanyahu is facing huge difficulties and is unlikely to be able to continue with the same policies much longer. Either he goes to war or does something else, but the present status quo is insupportable. Economically it does not work. Politically at least half of Israel disagrees with its government. And now Likud has lost some of its own constituency. The settlers, the most extreme of Netanyahu's one-time supporters, are now angry with him because of Hebron, amongst other things. Every time he meets with Arafat and shakes hands with him the leaders of the settlers call him a traitor. So he is now squeezed between the extreme right wing of his constituency, on one side, and the other half of the society that has been unhappy about his arrival to power. Add to this the fact that the business community is unhappy with him, and the Americans increasingly so, and his position begins to look difficult.

"So something is going to happen in the Middle East. Whether that something will be worse, or will lead to something better, I do not intend to predict. But sometimes wars result in vigorous peace drives. Sometimes wars open up the way to peace.

"What is certain is that the status quo is insupportable. The Palestinians are suffering terribly. They are placed under a state of siege, they are being punished for no reason, there are many people out of work, unable to sustain their families. This is very different from their suffering under the Labour government because then they had hopes — call them illusions if you want — that at some point things were going to get better and they would eventually have a state of their own. Today not only are they being starved, but they are also told that they do not have a hope in hell. And all this creates a very explosive situation in the area."

AMERICAN-ISRAELI RELATIONS: "From my recent trip to Washington, where I spoke to a great many people both inside the administration and out, two impressions remain. First, the American administration is unhappy about the situation in the Middle East for several reasons.

"They know that they can no longer peddle the peace process, as it is, to any Arab government, and Washington is keen to maintain good relations with the Arabs. The US is the sole super-power in the region, and it cannot risk ruining its relations with the whole Arab world just to please Mr. Netanyahu.

"Secondly, they do not think that Netanyahu can get away with what he is doing now, so even if they wanted to help him they know that it is a non-starter. Egypt is now taking a very hostile attitude to what is happening. King Hussein of Jordan, who was very close to Netanyahu, is now using strong language against the Israeli government. The Americans knew all along that Netanyahu was a non-starter, which is why they supported the Labour party, albeit in a clumsy way.

"It is a fact that they are not happy, indeed, that they have never been happy, with Netanyahu. But whether they act on this is an altogether different story.

"Two factors govern their ability to act. One has to do with American domestic policy, which is both very simple and extremely complicated. It is simple because we know that the Republicans have a majority of seats in congress and the Republican party is playing the Jewish lobby card, complicated because it is by no means clear what sort of balance of power there can be domestically before the Americans would intervene to change things.

"Second, as Netanyahu was democratically elected the American government is not in a position to take an openly hostile attitude to the Israeli government. The US also needs Israel, which for the past 50 years it has used to pursue its policy aims. No one should underestimate the strategic value of the state of Israel for the Pentagon, the State Department and the CIA. There is cooperation between Israel and America all over the world

"The American administration is then likely to use every opportunity that it is presented with to weaken the Netanyahu government, but they will not, I think, opt for any open confrontation."

Eric Rouleau is former French ambassador to Turkey and Tunisia

Yemen's modest expectations

1997 will witness general elections in Yemen held in a new climate of national reconcilliation, symbolised in part by the return of former South Yemeni president Ali Nasser Mohamed. **Fred Halliday** explains the limits of, and background to, democratisation and development in a country long afflicted by civil strife

"Yemen is aiming to improve relations with the Arab world, and the West, in order to improve its security and economic positions. The bid to join the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) is part of this, but one may doubt if it will succeed: the GCC is a club of rich monarchies, and has, so far as I know, no procedure for application. Relations with one GCC member, Kuwait, remain bad, and tensions with Saudi Arabia continue.

"As far as the West is concerned, Yemen has come under pressure from the US to cut its links with Iraq and Sudan and to expel foreign nationals suspected of involvement with Islamist terrorism in Saudi Arabia and Egypt and this has produced some changes in Yemeni policy.

"Yemen has also been able to improve its relations with the IMF and the World Bank and to reschedule its debt: the latter at $10 billion or 200 per cent of GNP, is very high, and owed mainly to the former Soviet bloc.

"But Yemen remains under pressure in a variety of spheres. Relations with Saudi Arabia have improved somewhat, but suspicions remain. Its relations with Eritrea took a dramatic turn for the worse in December 1995 when Eritrea occupied disputed islands in the Red Sea: the matter is now under arbitration, but far from being resolved. Above all, however, there is no strong desire of the international business community to invest in Yemen. Great emphasis has been laid on plans to develop Aden port as a regional hub for container traffic, and as a free zone, but these activities are at a very early stage.

"The return of President Ali Nasir Mohamed to Yemen is part of the pre-electoral manoeuvring in Yemen, but it would be surprising if it marked any substantial reorganisation of the regime.

"Ali Nasir's followers are to be found in both the ruling General People's Congress (GPC) and other parties, and some are high government officials. In that sense he acts as a support for the regime, as indeed some of his military units did in the 1994 war. But the president has been careful to refer to him as a 'citizen' (*muwatin*) and this implies a limit to what Ali Nasir will be allowed to do.

"He has a research institute, based in Damascus, and this may be allowed to operate. Were Ali Nasir, however, to develop serious political ambitions of an independent kind, then the president might seek to discourage them. Moreover, as a southerner, Ali Nasir would have limited appeal to the power structures, and population, of the north."

NORTH AND SOUTH: "The origins of the politics of both Yemens lie in the fraught division of Yemen into two parts. The modern movement of Yemeni nationalism, and for Yemeni unity, is an attempt to overcome that division.

"The division of Yemen was not a product of colonialism: the historical division of the country, under way since the eighteenth century, was compounded by the rival colonial regimes. After World War II, the division was reinforced by the politics of the Cold War: at first it was the south, under the British, which sided with the West, while the north, under a tactically nationalist Imam, turned to the Soviet bloc. After the 1962 revolution it appeared that a real Arab nationalist regime had been created in the north, with the aid of Egyptian forces. But after 1967 the Egyptians left, and the north became part of the conservative Arab bloc. The south, on the other hand, after the British withdrawal in 1967, formed an alliance with the Soviet bloc.

"But, side-by-side with the Cold War, there was always a strong drive for Yemeni unity, a result both of the Arab nationalist drive for unity, and of the way local parties responded to particular Yemeni conditions. Yemeni unity was a widely-supported goal, even though different political forces gave it different meaning and sought to use it for their own purposes.

"Thus when two independent Yemeni states had come into existence, after 1967, both supported unity though they meant by this support their own interpretations of it, and for their own states' interest. This explains why both states could, on one hand, espouse Yemeni unity, while on the other back opposition forces within each other's state, or even go to war as they did in 1972 and 1979. Though unity was popular it was always a means of prosecuting inter-state rivalry.

"The politics of the north falls into three phases. From the nationalist revolution of 1962 until 1970 North Yemen was gripped by civil war, pitting republicans against royalists. A compromise was reached in 1970 whereby a coalition regime was established, with the exclusion of the more partisan elements on both sides. From 1970 to 1978 Yemen was ruled by a series of presidents who tried to reconcile the army, the tribes, and the left-wing republican forces, and to reach some accommodation with the south. In 1978 an officer in the artillery forces, Ali Abdullah Saleh, took power, and has remained president ever since.

"President Ali Abdullah Saleh's regime has been based on military power, but has been supported by, on the one hand, careful alliances with tribal forces, and, on the other, by the building up of a political party, the General People's Congress.

"The GPC is a loose organisation, with an ideology of mild Arab nationalism. Numerous other parties exist, most notably the Islah Party, a coalition of tribal and Islamist elements, and, since the 1990 unification, the Yemeni Socialist Party. Over forty other parties exist. The main parties other than the GPC are permitted a legal existence, and some freedom of expression, but are not in a position to challenge the overall power structure or the distribution of state revenues. Much of the latter remain what is termed 'off budget'.

"After the independence of South Yemen in 1967 the Yemeni Socialist Party, originally left Nasserist, became a Marxist ruling party, modelled on the Soviet bloc. Radical social and economic reforms were introduced. But there were repeated leadership clashes within the regime — in 1986, President Ali Nasir Mohamed fled the country with tens of thousands of his supporters after a failed coup and a two-week civil war that cost several thousand lives. These conflicts weakened the leadership and the state as a whole and contributed to the decision to forge unity with the north in 1990.

"The end of the Cold War was also a major factor, though not the only one, in the November 1989 decision of the two Yemeni states to merge in May 1990. On the southern side, they could see that Soviet aid was ending and that their ideology, of constructing socialism, had to be modified. On the northern side, they faced problems with state control of society, and hoped to use southern resources to strengthen that control. At the same time, the allies of the north, Washington and Riyadh, were no longer opposed to Yemeni unity on the grounds that it might be exploited by the USSR. Unity came about both because of an opportunity, the end of the Cold War, and because of a crisis, facing both regimes internally."

THE SAUDI SHADOW: "Saudi Arabia and the Yemens have never had easy relations, and it is doubtful if they will for a long time to come. The Saudis defeated the north in the 1934 war and there have been disputes along both northern and southern frontiers ever since, partly resolved in an agreement, signed in February 1995, that covers some of the border with the north.

"The Saudis feel exposed to Yemeni immigration and possible political opposition, the Yemenis feel resentful at Saudi use of their wealth and pressure on the frontiers. Saudi Arabia has also been able in the past to use its influence with northern tribes to exert pressure on Sana'a. So while there has been diplomatic improvement, problems continue.

"Now, for example, the Yemenis still feel their migrant workers, expelled in 1990, should be allowed to return to Saudi Arabia, while the Saudis would like to negotiate the construction of a pipeline through eastern Yemen, near the Omani frontier, to the Indian Ocean. The Yemenis also criticise Saudi support for Yemeni opposition elements resident in the kingdom."

THE COST OF UNIFICATION: "The unification of the two Yemens in May 1990 was greeted with great enthusiasm at the popular level, and led to the formation of a coalition government, involving the ruling parties in north and south. But there seemed to be no plan for an effective merger of the administrations or armed forces, and, in effect, two states remained in existence.

"Popular enthusiasm also waned after the onset of the economic crisis provoked by the Gulf War of 1990-1991: Yemen did not support the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait, but did want to see the crisis solved by diplomatic means. Economic ties with the Gulf states were cut and around 800,000 workers expelled by Saudi Arabia. The cost to Yemen was around a third of its GNP — between $1 and $2 billion.

"The two partners to the coalition also began to become suspicious of each other, and from late 1991 there was a series of assassinations, mainly of southern, Yemeni Socialist Party, civilian and military, personnel. The elections of April 1993 did little to resolve this dispute: a new, third coalition party, the Islah, joined the government, and the southerners began to fear a northern takeover.

"In 1994 north and south descended into a civil war, which ended, on 7 July, with the entry of northern forces into Aden. For the south, this amounts to a northern conquest, especially as the defeat in the war has been accompanied by the growth of lawlessness in the south and the return to tribal leaders, and some newly created 'sheikhs', keen to repossess property and land. The commonest saying in the south now is '*ma fi nizam*': there is no order."

LIMITS TO DEMOCRATISATION: "Yemen is not a totalitarian state of the kind found in, say, Syria or Iraq, and there is greater freedom of expression than in many other regional states. There are political prisoners in Yemen and abuses of human rights, but not on the systematic scale found elsewhere. In part because the central state is so weak, there is a pluralism of centres of power — tribes have armed forces of their own, for example. But this multiplicity of centres does not amount to democracy in any proper sense. The rule of law is weak, security forces take arbitrary action against opponents.

"Elections will be held in April 1997 and this is to be welcomed. But this process has its limits, for three main reasons. In the first place, serious doubts have been raised about the validity of the voter registration process.

"Secondly, while parties will run in the election they will not, on past performance, have anything like equal access to the media during the election process. Thirdly, elections are for a parliament that is itself weak, and little more than a showcase: parliament cannot take decisions that affect the real distribution of power, or money, in the country.

"One may hope that the Yemeni elections will achieve the best possible for Yemen, but few believe they will provide a means of addressing the deep problems Yemen faces. Against a background of inflation, unemployment, personalised power and corruption, and with the lowest living standards in the Arab world, an election of this kind can achieve only a limited amount."

Fred Halliday is professor of International Relations at the London School of Economics and has a special interest in Yemen. His books include Arabia without Sultans *(1974) and* Revolution and Foreign Policy: the Case of South Yemen *(1990).*

Interviewed by ***Yasmine Allam***

Al-Ahram Weekly

Hebron, a big deal?

Nearly ten months delayed, the deal for an Israeli troop redeployment from Hebron seems imminent. The conclusion of this deal may mean that nearly 120,000 Palestinians will no longer be held hostage under the guise of ensuring the security of 400 Jewish settlers. It may also mean that the first step towards relaunching the final status negotiations has been taken. But make no mistake, it does not mean that the road to peace, or even the full implementation of this agreement, *will* be trouble-free. Already, Netanyahu has indicated that he will submit the agreement to the Knesset — meaning that the redeployment could be delayed for another ten days following its signing.

Moreover, the issue of security for the settlers is still of paramount importance to the Israeli premier, as is appeasing the hardliners in his coalition government. In short, this means that any deal struck with the hawkish Netanyahu, and which takes into account the rights of the Palestinians and the tenets of Oslo, will, without a doubt, be a source of anger for the right-wing extremists who have become increasingly more hostile as a result of Netanyahu's apparent change of face.

Netanyahu, therefore, has stated that he will sign the Hebron deal only if it guarantees Israeli control over the Tomb of the Patriarchs and the security of the Jewish settlers. But it is the settlers who are opposed to a troop redeployment, who massacred *29 Palestinians* at the *tomb* in *February 1994* and who are responsible for the death of a Palestinian child as he was returning home from school some weeks ago. With this in mind, which seems more likely, that the settlers need to be protected from the Palestinians or the Palestinians from the settlers?

Before the international community begins to clap its hands in delight over the progress in peace, it would be prudent to remember that Netanyahu is simply doing what he should have done months ago. He has offered no other firm commitments, and is unlikely to be able to reign in the settlers or the extremist MPs.

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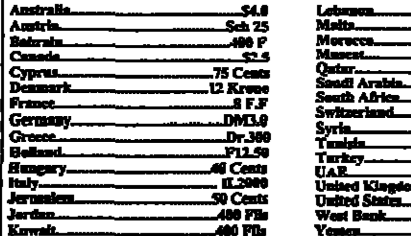
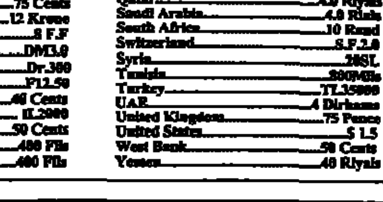
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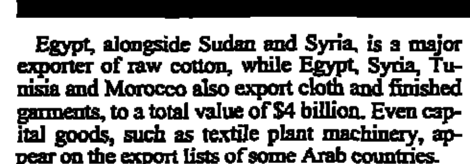
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		Yemen	40 Riyals

Surviving the global economy

The future health of Arab economies will depend on their ability to become more integrated, writes **Ibrahim Nafie**, for without such integration they will be increasingly marginalised



Inter-Arab trade accounts for no more than eight per cent of the *total volume of Arab trade*, a figure that, incidentally, includes many redirected commodities that had in any case already been imported from the West. This figure — particularly when contrasted with trade between the members of the European Union, which accounts for 66 per cent of its members total trading activities — underlines the enormous gap between current levels of Arab economic interaction and those which are required if the Arab world is ever to find a place for itself on an economic map increasingly divided into great economic blocs.

But how, on such a low volume of trade, are we to build the foundations that are necessary for the Arab world to consolidate its economic position? How, in short, can we build an Arab economic bloc?

First, of course, it is necessary to see a marked increase in inter-Arab trade. But is this possible? In the past, when low levels of inter-Arab trade reflected a lack of diversity in regional economies, many of which were based on the export of raw materials, particularly oil, this would not have seemed possible. Now, though, things have changed, and while oil continues to be the region's major export, many Arab countries have made great strides in diversifying their manufacturing bases, with the result that Arab exports are increasingly weighted towards manufactured and/or agricultural goods. And it is this fact that makes an increase in inter-Arab trade possible.

Certainly agrarian exports from Egypt, Jordan, Morocco, Lebanon, Syria and Tunisia might be increased. Morocco and Mauritania are major exporters of fresh and canned fish — the value of Moroccan fish exports in 1994 reaching $620 million, according to the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organisation — and Arab countries could well increase their market share of total Moroccan production. Egypt exports rice, which is imported by most Arab countries, while Tunisia is a major exporter of olive oil.

Egypt, alongside Sudan and Syria, is a major exporter of raw cotton, while Egypt, Syria, Tunisia and Morocco also export cloth and finished garments, to a total value of $4 billion. Even capital goods, such as textile plant machinery, appear on the export lists of some Arab countries.

Morocco and Jordan export phosphate and phosphate-based fertilisers, imported by those Arab countries unable to meet the demands of their agrarian industries with local production. And while there is substantial inter-Arab trade in raw oil and natural gas, trade in petrochemicals could be greatly increased. Saudi Arabia and the Gulf states are perfectly capable of meeting Arab demands for petrochemicals, though at the moment the bulk of petrochemicals imported by Arab countries come from outside the region. Similarly Egypt and Libya, net exporters of iron and steel, should seek to stimulate demand for their products in Arab markets. Egypt also exports aluminium alloy, bars and rods, which are imported by most Arab countries, and could well increase its share in the regional market.

Manufacture of components for the automobile industry has also been expanded in many Arab countries, and could well give impetus to increasing inter-Arab trade, especially given that Arab countries are all big importers of cars. The medical and pharmaceutical industries have also developed significantly in Arab countries recently, as has the electronics industry, all of which have contributed to the changing profile of inter-Arab trade.

To develop that trade, however, requires rather more than good intentions. Incentives need to be made available to those Arab investors whose projects would meet the needs of Arab markets. Such incentives could be usefully realised by adopting the kind of most-favoured nations trading system that is encouraged by GATT, allowing Arab economic relations eventually to be conducted within the framework of a free trade zone. And following such a development it should be a simple step to consolidate inter-Arab trade links within the context of a common Arab market, loosely fashioned on the model of the European Union.

The advantage of adopting some form of preferential treatment for Arab trading partners is that it will automatically lead to greatly increased volumes of trade, as well as improving the competitive edge of local industries. A common market would place Arab countries in a much better position vis-à-vis multinationals, and would guarantee Arab interests within increasingly global economic structures. Uncompetitive industries in some Arab states would close in favour of more efficient industries in other countries, allowing individual nations to optimise their production in accordance to the dictates of local conditions. Weak industries are, in the final analysis, a burden on national economies, consuming resources that could be *far more* profitably employed in activities for which the conditions of any particular country are more suited.

As I have mentioned in earlier articles, Arab countries will be compelled to implement the GATT agreement to liberalise trade and to open their markets to imports from other countries. And logic dictates that if Arab countries are to be forced to open their markets to foreign goods under GATT, then it would be better for Arab countries to liberalise their own economies now rather than later.

Fostering inter-Arab trade is, I believe, the only way to greater inter-Arab economic cooperation and the realisation of the dream of an Arab economic free zone is the only path we can take that will be of benefit to all Arab nations equally. So are Arab countries ready to take their first serious steps towards breaking trade barriers in the Arab world in the hope of achieving a better investment climate? I think they are, not least because policy makers now realise that this is the only way to guarantee the economic future of the Arabs in a global economy that is increasingly dominated by supranational economic blocs.

Is 'progress' a dead idea?

As we move into a new year, **Mohamed Sid-Ahmed** questions to what extent the forward flow of time can still be identified with the idea of 'progress'

When I wrote an article last summer (published in *Al-Ahram Weekly* on 18 July under the title "Are we moving forward or backward?") little did I think that a month later *Le Monde* would devote a whole series of articles to the same theme under the title: "Is Progress an idea that is dead?" The series questioned whether the idea of 'progress' was not a conceptual construct created by certain 'progressive' ideologies, notably, Marxism and liberalism, and whether it was not time to *reappraise the whole notion of* progress.

What is certainly true is that progress has generally been interpreted as meaning material progress, and that it has therefore been linked to achievements in the fields of science and technology and to man's ability to enhance his mastery over his environment. Unfortunately, however, material progress has not brought about spiritual and ethical progress, and it is highly questionable that man today is more humane and less bestial than he was, for example, in the days of Pericles' Athens five centuries BC, which produced such noted wise men as Socrates, Plato and Aristotle.

Actually, no century has witnessed ferocity on the scale reached during the 20th century, where massacres and acts of violence have become everyday occurrences. As the situation continues to deteriorate, the time has come to question whether progress can be *reduced to material progress, or* whether other criteria should be introduced. To begin with, we should ask ourselves whether material progress can lead to the moral and ethical betterment of the human species. Is there a specific threshold of welfare beyond which human beings can overcome their bestial instincts and display the virtues of a new kind of man? If, instead of being determined by indigence, frustration and resentment, man's behaviour can be conditioned by the full satisfaction of his basic needs, would a new situation arise where he will no longer feel that he is the victim of dispossession, alienation and aggression?

Communism believed it could create conditions for man's fulfilment through social emancipation and the agency of labour. Labour, according to Marxism, can create a new type of eth*ically-improved man, especially if the* class that personified Labour, the working class, assumed power, while other classes that lived as parasites on society were eliminated. But experience has proved that communist regimes have not succeeded — so far at least — in implementing this dream. Nor, for that matter, have liberal regimes in the West, based on democracy and a market economy, been able to rid society of basic flaws and achieve genuine progress, abundance and welfare either. Yet it is still commonly believed that, with abundance replacing scarcity thanks to the achievements of science and technology, man can be transformed and 'progress' accomplished, not only materially, but also spiritually. First, of course, we have to address the issue of whether abundance will ever really exist.

Scarcity is the basic law of political economy; it stands at the foundation of *the law of supply and demand. Com*modities and services acquire value only to the extent their availability is limited, that is, to the extent of their scarcity. When new products and services appear, new human needs for these products and services develop to the point where they are eventually transformed from luxuries to necessities. This reduces the margin for building up abundance.

And even if material abundance is built up, spiritual and ethical progress does not necessarily follow. For instance, it can be argued that Arab oil states have been blessed with abundance thanks to the dramatic rise in the price of oil following the '73 war. It can hardly be contended, however, that Arab ethical values have improved thanks to oil wealth. Some analysts have gone as far as to claim that because it is not the product of effort *and labour, oil wealth has in fact im*peded, rather than stimulated, the development of productive forces. Abundance and 'artificial' wealth can emerge here and there, but only temporarily and conditionally. In the final analysis, equilibrium is restored thanks to the more general law of supply and demand.

It has also been argued that, by reducing human want, progress in science and technology can help improve human behaviour. The proponents of this argument point to one aspect of contemporary science and technology in particular in this connection, namely, the fields of informatics and computer technology, which make every individual's identity determined not only in terms of the place of his birth, his ancestral traditions and cultural legacy, but also of some new form of planetary identity acquired thanks to direct and immediate access to the world at large via audio-visual chan*nels and information highways* (television, Internet, etc..). But even as they make people more familiar with each other, these techniques make them more aware of the differences between them. This can encourage the disadvantaged to turn inwards and cling desperately to their own traditions and patrimony rather than risk losing them by adhering to a wider, future-oriented community whose rules are beyond their grasp. For them, progress seems more a liability than an asset.

Modern science also teaches us that man is not at the centre of the Universe. He is just an element of undefined relevance, somewhere between the infinitely big and the infinitely small, among other living creatures on Earth, such as bacteria, which have proved to be more resilient than humans. So how can human progress be sustained when *change is beyond the scope of human* control?

Some have argued that the present gloomy mood is due to contingent, temporary, factors, related to the recent breakdowns in social engineering and the failure to sustain development and progress, whether within the context of socialist teachings or of capitalist/liberal practices. Moreover, the universe has proved much more complex than hitherto believed. Over-simplification has distorted man's attempts to master his fate. Awareness of how complex this task is has driven some to question whether comprehending the universe is humanly feasible, or whether it may not be wiser to surrender to some form of 'intellectual suicide', that is, admit to intellectual impotence. It is no accident that a central theme for many present-day philosophers is to question the very meaning of life (see, for instance, the latest book by the French philosopher, Luc Ferry, *L'Homme-Dieu*).

History has proved to follow a non-linear course, making the future very difficult to predict accurately. But, as a whole, history has a direction and accordingly progress cannot be discarded. Otherwise, it would be possible to achieve progress backwards!

Writing again

By Naguib Mahfouz

I have a special wish for the new year. I hope that my right arm heals completely, so that I may go back to writing. My desire to write has not abated at all during the past three years. My mind is crowded with ideas, but my right hand still refuses to hold the pen. As for dictation, I use it for letters, or newspaper articles, but in literary work, the impulses go straight from the heart to the hand, and I know of no other way to express my ideas.

Some writers were able to express themselves without putting pen to paper. Taha Hussein is an example; but he had done that all his life, and did not have to start learning to use a new technique when he was eighty-five. I also know of writers who have learned to work on a computer instead of with a piece of paper and a pencil, but the time to learn new skills is long past for me. For more than half a century, I have been used to writing by hand, and in writing I have poured my very heart out. "Writing" — expressing my ideas and thoughts — is, for me, inextricably linked with the physical act of writing, the moment when the ink begins to flow through the pen and on to the paper. I know of no other way.

Based on an interview by Mohamed Salmawy.

The Press This Week — New Year thoughts

October: "We are not the only ones preparing for the next century. All the countries of the world are getting ready. And only three years are left before we find out who actually is prepared and who has wasted time merely babbling. We should not forget that there are countries which were at the bottom of the list and suffering from hunger — like Indonesia, Malaysia and the Philippines — whose products now invade the world's market and are gaining a reputation for technological competence. We are no less than those countries. Let our slogan for 1997 be 'more work and less talk' and let the rule for the year be 'no status for anyone except through work'."
(Ragab El-Banna, 29 December)

Rose El-Youssef: "The most important event of the year was the exposure of cases of corruption and their investigation by different judiciary bodies. This does not mean that Egypt has become a nation of crooks. It simply means that Egyptian society is trying to cleanse itself and absolve itself of its sins. It chose to do this when the time was right and when the press was there to help. Not only are we disclosing the distortion of ethics, but also that of minds and thoughts. We shall continue to fight ignorance and the enemies of freedom and democracy."
(Editorial, 30 December)

Al-Arabi: "We have every right to dream, for shaping the future always starts with a dream and a hope. Reviving hope for the future is among the main characteristics of Prime Minister Kamal El-Ganzouri's cabinet... While we dream we should begin at the beginning [and ask]: what exactly do we want? We have every right to dream, but within limits. The premier is talking about a 20-year plan, but who exactly studied it, discussed it and sanctioned it?
(Mahmoud El-Maraghi, 30 December)

Al-Wafd: "Binyamin Netanyahu deserves to be described as 'the worst catastrophe of 1996', not only in relation to Israel but also to the region in general and Egypt in particular... This has become apparent since the Likud came to power in Israel amidst the crises of no peace, settlements and colonisation, revelations of the killing POWs, nuclear stockpiling, spying and finally through a propaganda war and provocative statements... The only option for Israel, Likud and Netanyahu is to renounce violence and bloodshed and finally accept peace. Otherwise they will drop to the ground like autumn leaves."
(George Fahim, 25 December)

Al-Shaab: "The Arab-Israeli conflict continues and will continue in all its forms... The problem is that Israel and its US patron keep on talking about the end of violence and conflict while what is actually taking place is not peace but an attempt to reach a settlement. A settlement is not peace. Peace has its conditions which will never be fulfilled so long as a Zionist, racist expansionist Israel pursues a policy of supremacy over its neighbours."
(Mahgoub Omar, 24 December)

Al-Ahram: "Undoubtedly there is no alternative to joint Arab action whether we are talking about political settlement, economic problems and the effects of GATT or of the obstacles in the way of cultural progress in individual Arab countries... The foreseen gloom of 1997 compels us to breathe life into it through joint Arab action which can be achieved by maintaining the awareness that came from the Arab summit last June, working to increase Arab cooperation and blending the will of the masses with that of the rulers."
(Mahmoud Murad, 27 December)

Al-Akhbar: "It is clear that there is a determination on the part of the concerned parties to bring about an Israeli-Palestinian agreement on Hebron before the beginning of 1997. These developments point to the importance of the US role in the peace process, Egypt's pivotal role, and Arab sincerity in achieving peace... We hope that 1997 will be the year of a just, comprehensive and permanent peace — which is in the interest of all the nations of the region including Israel."
(Editorial, 29 December)

Al-Ahali: "The responsibilities of spy catchers increase greatly in times of peace and open borders. Yet there is one unpleasant aspect about this issue: many of the spies caught were Egyptians — a phenomenon which did not exist during the '50s and '60s... Could there be a link between this and open borders, privat*isation and normalisation? Could it have anything to do* with the regression of values and the current moral chaos? Or could it be due to mixing friend and foe? I think so."
(Amin Howeidi, 25 December)

compiled by **Hala Saqr**



The key to Pope Shenouda's expression lies in his eyes and imposing beard. The precise details of every segment of his face — every line — remind me of a medieval miniature. The texture of his skin is similar to that of the papal robes as his hands are half-raised in supplication.

Close up

Salama A. Salama

Challenging the old

Political and civil rights in 1996 were the scene of many significant developments and new challenges. While Egyptians were able to exercise their rights in the face of adversity in some instances, they failed to rise to the challenge in other situations. In the new year, born yesterday, civil and political freedoms will surely be challenged again, particularly during the local elections, due to take place in the coming weeks. The elections are perceived as an opportunity to assess our progress — or lack thereof — in democracy and respect for human rights and freedoms — an exercise understood today as a yardstick of true progress in any country.

The last People's Assembly elections left their mark on the Egyptian political scene throughout the year. The election of a large number of members has been contested as illegal. Many of the charges have been endorsed by rulings issued by the Court of Cassation, which has brought to light the legal and constitutional distortions of the state authority mandated to rule when the legitimacy of the electoral process is challenged. The People's Assembly, which perceives itself as an autonomous institution, has rejected the ruling of the highest judicial body in the country in several cases. Its politically charged arguments, used to justify its rejection of court rulings, have failed to generate popular support, and the matter remains an issue of controversy.

Against this backdrop, it was only to be expected that those who oppose the freedoms of thought and of expression should score two victories: they succeeded in securing a court ruling to separate Nasr Hamed Abu Zeid from his wife, on charges of apostasy. Secondly, they succeeded in pushing through the ban of Youssef Chahine's *The Immigrant*, the film about the life of Joseph. These two incidents prompted the government to promulgate a new law aimed at organising *hisba* procedures and giving the public prosecutor the sole right to file a *hisba* case. Nasr Hamed Abu Zeid's case is still before the court, but is only one of several cases awaiting the court's ruling.

The question of how to protect freedom of thought, expression and belief is still surrounded by ambiguity and confusion. A number of books have been banned, presumably on Al-Azhar's initiative. Shi'ite thought has been attacked under the pretext of deterring the infiltration of Iranian revolutionary propaganda. Film stars and artists have demanded that books or articles about their lives be banned, and the authorities are actually in the process of studying the matter with a view to issuing relevant legislation in the near future.

Despite several failures to achieve fuller freedom of expression, 1996 also witnessed some positive developments, albeit few and far between.

The Press Syndicate succeeded in stopping Law 93 for 1995, passed by the previous People's Assembly at the government's instigation. The law introduced harsher penalties which would have guaranteed journalists endless problems: continuous harassment, possible prison terms, heavy fines... The press law debates began, fast and furious, in early 1996 and lasted until the middle of the year. The participants in these heated debates freely exercised their democratic rights, and the process culminated in the repeal of the infamous law and the promulgation, in its stead, of Law 96, which is free from most, if not all, the clauses which had so infuriated journalists.

It may be said with reasonable certainty that the press enjoyed an atmosphere favourable to freedoms of opinion and expression during 1996. Newspapers competed honourably in uncovering many cases of corruption, and El-Ganzouri's government has reacted with a new sense of respect for and confidence in the press.

The appearance of *Al-Dustour* on the press scene has disturbed the tranquil — at times even stagnant — waters of both the Egyptian national and party press. It set the ground rules for the emergence of an independent, private press which is neither financed nor directed by the government or political parties. This paper has set a trend for the future which may well remedy many of the ills plaguing the Egyptian press today.

The press, however, lost a number of its most illustrious pioneers and former syndicate heads: namely Ahmed Bahaeddin, Hussein Fahmi and Hafez Mahmoud; it also lost one of its most talented marketing men, Adel Afifi, as well as prominent scientific editor Abbas Mabrouk. Let us hope that 1997 brings more victories than defeats, and more cries of fair than foul.



Soapbox

Trends for '97

It has become necessary to review the international situation periodically as change becomes increasingly rapid.

The US withdrew from UNESCO a few years ago, then last year from UNIDO. For Washington, the function of international organisations must be revised according to the needs of a different world. The Pax Americana is in many ways reminiscent of the Pax Romana centuries ago.

European-US relations are also following new trends. De Gaulle's desire for an independent French foreign policy, three decades ago, has become a European vision in recent years.

Asian foreign policy will also grow increasingly influential in the future. The next century may indeed be Asia's; China's potential (with or without Japan) and the Asian tigers' more effective role will combine with India's weight to modify the course of international relations.

The deterioration of the quality of life, political stability and social integration in Africa, now marked by poverty, ethnic conflict and violence, made last year one of the worst in that continent's recent history.

In conflict resolution world-wide, time is now of the essence. Conflicts are left to simmer, in the hope that the parties involved will grow accustomed to the presence of tensions. Any threat to peace and stability must be deterred at any cost, but complete solutions are no longer sought; justice and comprehensive peace are becoming mere postulates, hypothetical conclusions.

While the preponderance of economic factors over political considerations is hardly a new phenomenon, the primacy of highly complex trade relations on the international relations scene will also contribute to shaping the future of the globe.



This week's soapbox speaker is Egypt's ambassador to Austria and its representative at the international organisations in Vienna.

Mustafa El-Fiqi

End of year contradictions

While 'progress' was being achieved over Hebron, an Israeli court fined four Israeli soldiers a tenth of a shekel each for the murder of a Palestinian youth. Unconnected events? To highlight the contradiction between pretense and truth is a New Year's resolution worth striving for, writes **Edward Said**

Aside from an extremely long series of meetings between Israeli and Palestinian politicians and security officials, in addition to Israeli military deployments that have netted sixty per cent of Gaza and three per cent of the West Bank, it is difficult to see much about the three year period of the peace process that has been peaceful. Relations between Palestinians are as bad, if not worse, then they have ever been. The Palestinian economy is in a ruinous state, with no prospects for improvement, even less for reform. West Bank and Gaza residents live underneath an Authority which has deliberately kept them without a real legal system, no independent judiciary, and a paralysed legislature.

According to the 2 December Amnesty International report which deals with the abuses of the eleven security agencies run directly by Arafat, the security situation of individual Palestinian civilians has deteriorated dramatically after the peace process; the report also makes the point that all the ugliest features of the Israeli occupation, including torture and illegal detention, have been replicated in the Authority's practices.

To make matters worse, Israeli attitudes to and collective behaviour toward their Palestinian peace partners derive relatively unmodified from the same racist history that Rabin and Peres were given so much credit for transcending. Any serious reader of the Oslo and Taba accords could have seen that far from changing Zionist racism the implementation of the Israeli-engineered texts guaranteed the preservation, and indeed the enhancement of Israeli domination.

There is no more dramatically shocking evidence of real Israeli attitudes towards the Palestinians as a people than the incident reported on 20 November by *The Washington Post* in which four Israeli soldiers were charged and actually convicted with the negligent killing of a twenty year-old Palestinian who was accused of neither crime nor misdemeanor. What was the military court's verdict? A one hour prison sentence which was immediately suspended, as well as a fine of one agora, or one per cent of a shekel. The sentence, which has nothing to do with Netanyahu's presence in power, was meant to illustrate the worth of an Arab life so far as the state of Israel is concerned. These soldiers were in effect being told that they were guilty of the crime of murder which, since it only involved the life of a Palestinian, was not too serious a crime.

Given today's completely false political language, as used by politicians and journalists, stories about the ever-so-dramatic negotiations over Hebron do not allow for any connection between those stories and the agora verdict, as if each existed in a separate realm. Thus the glaring contradiction between the appearance of making peace and Israel's radical racism towards non-Jews "in the land of Israel" is spirited away. Thus as readers we are invited, indeed coaxed into forgetting the premises of the Oslo Accords, that is, as Palestinians we have been required to accept not only the loss of our history in Palestine, but any clear and unequivocal commitment on Israel's part that we are entitled to equal self-determination, and sovereignty in our own land as a people.

No one today in the Palestinian and Arab leadership; works for the peace process without also tacitly accepting the premise of our fundamental inferiority to "the Jewish people". But a few of us remain to ask the question as to why that concession was made in the first place, and why do we exonerate the leadership in its incompetence and lack of real political will. The language of the peace process has trapped most commentators into perceiving the shambles of the Hebron negotiarions as a real battle, whereas all Mr Arafat is trying to do is to let that already-lost battle (even if agreement is reached today or next week, the result is that he gave away the control of Hebron well before Netanyahu's victory last May) appear like a brave last stand, which is an almost total fiction.

Besides, as the agora verdict demonstrates more powerfully than words, Israel continues to practice its racism, even while it misleadingly preaches and proclaims the opposite. This has been its political strategy from day one of its existence, acting with total contempt for an inferior race of "non-Jews" (as Palestinians are still described juridically in all the literature and laws of the state) and claiming all sorts of rights and spiritual privileges that it totally denies to everyone else. But by the present logic of denial and misinformation that also allows our leadership to use those tactics against the own people, we "must" focus on Hebron and forget all the rest. According to a more serious and truthful logic, however, it is necessary to connect Hebron, the agora verdict, and the real meaning of our engagement in the American-Israeli peace process in order to make the searing contradiction at the heart of these things more apparent.

Lastly, we must try to restore the real human tragedy of the Palestinian people to the language of the peace process, which has stripped it of any real human context and given it an appearance of conferences, meetings, statements and the rest, with the result that most commentators have simply eliminated the core of the peace process, which is that the human situation for all Palestinians has become worse because, and not in spite of, the peace process.

Why have we lost the capacity to be concrete about the losses and deprivations imposed on us by the peace process, and to connect them with the ruinous, indeed even criminal stupidity of a leadership; that still has to get permission in order to leave Gaza, that still cannot learn when to say yes and when to say no, that still cannot benefit from its own history of struggle and give its people even a shred of democracy, and continues with impunity to compete with Mobuto and Hastings Banda for shameless corruption and pointless cruelty? Those contradictions between pretense and truth should be highlighted, not buried in the innocuous formulas about the progress of peace. That is a New Year's resolution worth striving to achieve.

A new year unlike any other

The new year begins, writes **Ragab El-Banna**, with immense promise. The foundations for the twenty-first century are already in place

Kamal El-Ganzouri is the first Egyptian prime minister whose message to the nation is not only "let us dream", but also "let us work to realise our dreams". He realises our need to dwell on the present, but insists that we should look ahead. He has set himself the task of preparing the country for a new century and, armed with his resolve, has led his ministers into a virtual revolution against established methods of work in the Egyptian administration.

It has been a very long time since an Egyptian prime minister projected optimism, determination and confidence that he would achieve his goals. It is equally difficult to recollect when an Egyptian prime minister did not exhort people to "tighten their belts" — for some 50 years, one government after another has made this request, forecasting times of scarcity. El-Ganzouri, on the other hand, insists: "Hold me accountable for my promises."

This is why we can begin the new year with a sense that 1997 may well witness the beginning of the realisation of our dreams, the inception of great ventures in every aspect of our lives.

There is much to justify the sense of optimism on the Egyptian street. The government is working seriously to disentangle the complex web of bureaucratic procedures and regulations. Working groups at the Ministry of Justice have been working overtime to revise laws and regulations, and are close to finalising the drafts of a number of basic laws, including new laws on adjudication which guarantee a faster and more effective legal process. Other draft laws currently under preparation will provide new incentives to foreign investors, outline the legal framework for the next stages in the privatisation process, and inject the transition to a market economy with new life.

Objectives for 1997 include the expansion of arable land by 25 per cent, beyond the narrow confines of the Nile Valley to which Egyptians have been confined for 7,000 years. This implies nothing less than re-drawing the map of Egypt.

For several months now, ministers and experts have been working around the clock to put the finishing touches on this grand project. At the moment, working groups are deployed at various spots in Egypt's deserts, preparing them for the new life which will soon spring forth within them. A few days ago I made a brief visit to Ismailia. I was astounded by the bee-hive of activity in the governorate offices. The governor, Maj Gen Mohamed El-Mahgoub, speaks not in terms of "we will do..." but always of "we have started work on..." The projects to which he was referring are not small-scale local ventures, but great national projects financed, planned and led by the central government.

There, I saw the Nile, ready to cross over into Sinai. Already, the Al-Salam Canal has reached the Suez Canal — three quarters of the work on the giant tunnels through which the Nile waters will pass to Sinai has been carried out, while the remaining quarter is due to be finished in exactly five months. Also near conclusion is work on section two of the Al-Salam Canal, running through the sands of Sinai. Approximately 400,000 feddans of the arid peninsula's desert are being prepared for cultivation. This land will be irrigated for the first time in history by the waters of the Nile and made green and populous by the hands of tens of thousands of young farmers, technicians and craftsmen, who will establish the farms and new modern villages of Sinai.

A dream is coming to fruition.

The Ferdan bridge over the Suez Canal is also near completion. It will link Sinai to the rest of the country more closely than ever before. A railway line will cross over the bridge, extending to El-Arish and Rafah. The significance of a railway line crossing over the Suez Canal and linking Egyptian cities in the Delta and Upper Egypt to Sinai cannot be overestimated. An entirely new urban life will spring up along this railway line, which will facilitate immeasurably the transportation at low cost of people, equipment and goods. For the rest of the country, El-Arish, El-Tor or Sheikh Zoweid will no longer be regarded as remote and distant backwoods; they will soon become indistinguishable from Tanta, Damanhour or Sohag.

A second canal is also being dug to bring more of the Nile's water to Sinai. Sinai is massive and one canal is not enough, for the project to reconstruct and populate the peninsula is grander than poets and dreamers can envision.

I have also seen a complete plan of the Technology Valley that is to be established over a huge area of Sinai. Some of the largest international corporations are currently engaged in negotiations with the Egyptian government, bidding to lease plots of land in this valley where they will establish high-tech ventures aimed at the Egyptian, Arab and international markets. Technology Valley project is actually in the implementation stage; it is not just an idea or a subject for study. Again, the implications of such a project are far greater than its direct objectives. One highly significant spin-off will be its effect on narrowing the technology gap between Egypt and the advanced industrial countries. No longer will our scientists and technicians depend solely on scholarships abroad for training in the latest in applied sciences, this will be possible on our own land.

Fully-staffed and -equipped institutions of higher learning are also operating in Sinai, complete with professors, students, labs and large research projects. Faculties in Sinai, which are currently operating under the auspices of the Ismailia-based Suez Canal University, are on the verge of being transformed into an independent university.

A new dawn is rising over Sinai, which is being transformed into a vibrant and bustling site of industry and culture, to be populated by 10 million people at least.

Tens of new tourist villages have appeared, the roads intersecting the peninsula are no longer lonely and desolate but vibrate with the busy traffic of thousands of tourists, Egyptian and non-Egyptian, workers, technicians and businessmen.

What is taking place in Sinai today is nothing less than a dream being transformed into reality.

Unfortunately, few Egyptians are aware of this. When the Aswan High Dam was being built, there was not an Egyptian who did not follow its progress day by day and hour by hour. A huge billboard announced not only the days, but the hours and minutes remaining before completion. Engineers, technicians and workers building the High Dam were driven by a tremendous sense of patriotic responsibility, almost as if they were fighting a war in defence of the homeland, in which they would either triumph or die honourably. Almost every school in the country organised annual field trips to the dam's construction site, for the students to view progress on the spot. This was natural, perhaps, in view of the fact that the construction of the High Dam was intimately linked to a political battle waged by the Egyptian people, and for which they fought against the tripartite military aggression of Britain, France and Israel in 1956.

Today, the extensive construction plans underway in Egypt are taking place with the least fuss. Egyptians are therefore spared the inconveniences to which the workers involved in these major projects are subjected. Unaware of the effort that went into completing the projects, people consider them nothing more than an everyday occurrence, especially when they end up watching the results on television.

The effort involved in the major construction works taking place in Sinai is far greater than the effort put into building the Aswan High Dam. Egyptians are currently building what amounts to over a hundred high dams. Yet at the same time these works are not receiving sufficient publicity or media coverage.

President Mubarak's visit to Sinai, where he inaugurated the Al-Salam Canal, came as a surprise to most Egyptians. For the first time the audience saw this gigantic project on television, oblivious to the effort and costs that went into its construction. Some might prefer this approach because, by presenting the public with an accomplished task, the government's credibility is enhanced and people are not left to worry about with unfinished business. I, on the other hand, subscribe to a different view. Why should we deprive people from participating with enthusiasm when faced with an immense national task? Had people realised the magnitude of the work taking place in Sinai, young people would have been inspired to willingly seek employment there without considering it a sacrifice, thereby creating new industrial communities.

Another project that is set to materialise in the coming year is an industrial free zone on the other side of the Suez canal facing Port Said. Besides housing a number of industrial, export-oriented and manufacturing plants, this area will also feature the largest harbour in the Middle East, linking Europe, Asia and Africa.

The Toshki Spillway, already under operation and costing billions of dollars, will reclaim half a million feddans of desert south of the Delta.

The coming year will witness many other developments, including a modernised educational system, an expanded metro line reaching Shubra, Giza, the airport, and Tenth of Ramadan City.

Efforts are also underway to promote the role of the private sector. Over the next five years it is estimated that 75 per cent of investments in the country's development projects will come from private capital. This development will transform a society that traditionally relied on the state into a society that advocates individual initiative.

There are other dreams. As projects get underway, they will provide three million jobs for the country's unemployed; Egyptian exports will increase by one billion dollars annually. The private sector will, for the first time, enter the production sphere through oil refineries and petrochemical industries.

What has already been achieved in the sphere of electricity surpasses the imagination, given an almost 50 per cent increase in electric power to provide energy for new projects. Telephone lines will expand, new roads will be constructed, and one million new houses will be built. We will witness a surge in the quality and speed of scientific research.

The coming year represents the starting point of a new race for which Egypt has been preparing itself for the last 15 years. While foreign investments are given every encouragement, Egyptian investments will always have a priority. We do not want to see Egypt progress thanks to foreign investments alone, however good the intentions may be. Egyptians will always be more attentive to their country's strategic interests. Egyptians do not lack wealth; it is necessary to review attitudes and the prevailing pattern of consumer behaviour, reinforced by numerous advertising campaigns. Some believe that greater consumption leads to greater production, more job opportunities and greater capital flow. While this may be so, without the completion of an industrial base, it is not feasible to focus on consumer and food industries only while other countries rely on primary or heavy industries for development.

Foreign investors are rarely interested in heavy industry. Foreign investment seeks to amass profit in the shortest time possible, with the smallest investment. They come to Egypt to invest in projects that do not contribute to development. Development does not come from ice-cream parlours or fast-food enterprises but from investment in iron, cement, automobiles, planes and machinery. These can only be initiated by Egyptians through the establishment of new companies in which the middle-class, driven by a sense of national pride can invest their savings.

In 1997, we must promote savings and investments. Currently, the rate of saving is only 16 per cent of GDP, while the minimum rate should be 25 per cent. The government considers that the solution to low savings is reliance on foreign investment; I believe, however, that the solution lies in encouraging an attitude that would make savings attractive to Egyptians. To Egyptians, saving means buying gold and keeping their purchases at home. They may be excused, given the tragedy of the investment companies which caused many to lose their savings. Nevertheless, effort must be made to find ways of restoring confidence in secure institutions, through which people can invest money. It is necessary to convince Egyptians who have deposited billions of dollars abroad to bring back their capital and invest it in Egypt.

The coming year will be unlike every other year. It will be the starting point for major changes, and a new beginning in preparation for the 21st century.

The writer is the chairman of the board of Dar El-Ma'aref publishing house and the editor-in-chief of October *weekly magazine.*

Al-Ahram Weekly
2 - 8 January 1997



The last pianist of 1996 — Andras Schiff

Get up and go

David Blake emerges from the board room

Piano Recital; Andras Schiff; J S Bach Fifteen 3 Part Inventions; Beethoven Piano Sonata 23 F minor, op 37 (Appassionata); Schumann Kreisleriana op 16; Schumann Thema and Variations, E flat major; Cairo Opera House, Main Hall, 26 December

Omens are propitious — the *schiff* comes briefly to port.

In the register of pianistic icons of the late 20th century, he stands high. Like Tristan's *schiff*, he moves through the oceans of time. From Wigmore London to Salzburg, to Cairo and ports further afield. On the pianist's hemispheric track he sits at his instrument rather like Thelonius Monk — and delivers.

Not quite as insolent as Rachmaninov, but he still delivers, gets up and goes. That's that. You've had it. Likeable — no biz-hype for him.

1996 has been the year of the piano and Schiff is the last of them to give yet another take on the dark hydra that lurks in the shadow for its torero *to begin the fight.*

Schiff is unfazed by the entire gamut of the piano recital. He is master of that special aspect of it which often throws the finest players off balance — the microscopic glare that uncovers the slightest sense of strain or tension in the player. Andras Schiff is Mr Everything — been everywhere, has nothing left to know. His self-confidence presents him with an unimpeachable front. And so it should be. But there is a price to be paid for such diligence: it can be monotonous and pedantic — two shadows which at times haunt his performances. At times he is a throw-back to the great Russians of former years. OK, Vladimir, now give us the thrills. Vulgar, but that's one more problem for the performing artist to solve.

Andras Schiff — Oedipus as pianist — has answered all the riddles of the sphinx in front of him, except one: how to barter away the rather vulgar joys of the erotic allure of piano tone in the interests of intellectual conception. Von Bulow solved this one. Such is Schiff's intellectual grip on the music, he succeeds — almost. But the bald patches show. There were longeurs which called out for more bodily functions to be felt.

The Bach 3 Part Inventions showed the way we would go. Bach-playing has for over 30 years been in the same quandary. Which way to go on the piano. Feist — or famine. We had famine. Bury Landowska and Kempff. This is it for the bow-out performances of the century. No one expects an organ toccata sound but these inventions which can mean anything to any player were scantilly and meanly clad. They hopped and skipped briskly, weaving and wandering. No 8 grandly flourished. Ironically they seemed to be corsetted and bustled in structures from other ages. Not a shade of a new relaxation or informal freedom. And certainly not helped by a papery tone. Should Bach, would Bach? Does it matter? The *zeitgeist demands a new formality*: academics under a new name, but the restrictions are the same. One day maybe Mozart, as piano music, will again be "*jolie*". Then take to the mountains, join the partisans.

Beethoven! The F minor op 57 called *Appassionata*. This was shiver-making, an explosion of cyclothymic unease. Description best left to notes and sounds. Even the sparse tone came into its own. Most pianists divide it into three movements. Not so Schiff. His hands flew over the keys. No time for contemplation. He gets much of his power and zest from the left hand, and like Uchida his stabs come up from the deep, revealing musical forms we have not encountered before. A choreographic whirlpool, like the mating rituals of scorpions, from where even the wolves have fled.

It is really the listener who is confronted by the furious nightmare of a piano which lives in hell, no longer merely an instrument brought to life by a player. Schiff *was really the ship moving* over troubled waters. After this unnerving Beethoven, the Schumann followed and seemed unending. Longeur showed on the surface. Who loves Schumann takes him entire. So did Schiff. But Schumann does need cosmetic surgery here and there, if the distances covered are not to seem wearisome.



Youssef El-Sisi photo:Antoune Albert

With Richter and Arraw to add the power of body tone here and there we are not travel stained. Schiff, though, gave the Kreisleriana raw. What might have been lovable was chairman-of-the-board stuff.

Schiff is not one to stoop to chic, cheap clothes. To him, holes are holes and have to be accounted for. The gods were elsewhere in this Schumann. Every listener must be grateful to this player in an age which glorifies the power of technique over all else, that he puts technique in its place and shows that there are things of more importance.

Nutcracker Ballet; Cairo Opera Ballet Co.; dir Abdel-Moneim Kamel; Academy of Arts Ballet School; Cairo Opera Orchestra; Conductor Ivan Filev; Cairo Opera House, Main Hall, 25 December

Christmas comes but once a year and everyone has a go at the Tchaikovsky-Ivanov ballet. It's a warm and loving fairy tale with narrative and endless variations. In fact, it is a single variation with one central theme: the music of Tchaikovsky itself. It enchants. Variety, ease, care, unending inspiration and a genius for understanding the dance.

This performance owes much to Ivan Filev. He is staunch and true to the music's special demands. The Cairo Opera Orchestra did him and itself proud after the awful show which turned the three *Traviatas* of Verdi into a cadenza for the piccolo. Filev's tempos were zesty but not sadistic — no pushing the dancers. The whole ballet was the happiest event since the first revival.

Abdel-Moneim Kamel's oft-criticised policy of founding the Cairo Opera Ballet Company on these old classics was justified. The Sleeping Beauty herself, the pinnacle of the classics, now waits for his kiss to get up and go. The long two acts of the *Nutcracker* were trimmed and pruned to fit a company which can now afford two completely different casts. The performance of the first night had Konstantine Gerniok as the Prince and Alexandra Volkhovskaya as Clara, the heroine whose gift of a nutcracker from a Mr Drosselmeyer causes all the trouble.

The nutcracker, broken by Clara's brother but mended again, causes metamorphic, magical changes in the entire company of dancers. They journey to Far Eastern lands, turn into rat princes, lovable demons, delectable children, fairies and snowflakes, all jostling the scene for their moment of joy — the dance. Even the trees dance. Lights dim then glow. All this begins on earth and ends on the earth as a wiser Clara discovers that the multi-storeyed fantasy of dream can topple down into another and better world, her own family life warm and embracing.

Lovely stuff for 1997. So keep looking for your nutcrackers with soft hearts and big beautiful houses. This fantasy is done to show how close daily life is to the lurking fantasies from other worlds which surround us. The new production piles layer upon layer of colour, sound and splendid dancing to make this not only a pantomime but a morality play for Christmas. It succeeds on all levels.

Gerniok and Volkhovskaya make a handsome pair. He has line, looks and *elevation. His movements are athletic* and elegant enough to fit the story. Volkhovskaya makes the ballerina role frail, perfect legs, light and always central to the choreography. The couple know how to make entrances and exits, essential and pivotal in these old ballets. They are super people about to deliver star quality, unfailingly watchable. Drosselmeyer, Sergei Bolonsky, witty elevated and master of magic ceremonies, keeps the story moving. Rat King, Adel Hassan, and rat rousers from the Academy of Arts Ballet School, had the audience standing. But however, there is not too, too much happiness, because nothing cloys and that is the real charm of the show. Its feet are firmly on ground, even amid the sugar fudge. Two visits could be better than one.

All the variations often ripped out of *Nutcracker* to enliven other ballets are properly in their places, especially the Chinese Tea Dancers — Kerniok, Samah Said and Nevine Nabil. This section of the ballet goes with proper dignity. Nothing amateur or hurried. No suggestion of get on with the last bits. The eye of the director, Abdel-Moneim Kamel, cares that *each, no matter how small, is given* proper place in the spotlight of the carefully built up finale. It comes with the two principles giving great lifts, turns, throws and catchings in mid-air, everything glowing and snow-covered with enchantment. This night put the opera well in the place it should occupy — the purveyor of class and authority.

Cairo Symphony Orchestra; Great Symphonies (III); Hassan Sharara, violin; Sergei Terenko & Dimitar Dimitrov, trumpet; conductor Youssef El-Sisi; Cairo Opera House, Main Hall, 21 December

A last piece of haunting. On the night of 21 December, seemingly a quiet pre-holiday hiatus, came Youssef El-Sisi and the Cairo Symphony Orchestra to the Main Hall and a small audience. What people miss. They gave El-Saedi's *Introductions and Variations for Trumpet and Strings* a martial, almost Elgarian, grandeur.

Mozart's *Symphonia Concertante for Violin and Orchestra, K 364*. The two string players uttered and answered each other with the orchestra as arbitrator of a Mozart performance to remind us of the strength and validity of the classical ideal.

What followed was the 6th *Pathetique* Symphony of Tchaikovsky — another thing altogether. El-Sisi is a Protean conductor, his elegance, almost forgetful, carries him through everything — ancient to modern. Then, suddenly, a mood hits him, Donne-like, and he rings all the bells at once. He did it last season in a *La Boheme* performance of power.

He did it this night. The big symphony simmered along, but without a note of self-pity, kept perpetually on the edge of extinction. Tchaikovsky is being salutary — don't look too deep, it's your own skin they're after, the last of me has gone long ago. El-Sisi *gently sculpted it with his hands* like a potter and, finally, moulded it to a last breathless phrase and the symphony was gone without even a sigh. Silence. El-Sisi very gently stepped down and left the scene.

Listings

EXHIBITIONS

Shaker El-Madawi (Paintings)
Salama Gallery, 36/A Ahmed Orabi St, Mohandessin. Tel 346 3242. Daily 10am-2.30pm & 5pm-9pm. Until 2 Jan.

Usama Mohamed (Glassworks) & **Abdel-Nasser Shiha** (Batik)
Extra Gallery, 3 El-Nessim St, Corner of Montaza St, Zamalek. Tel 340 6293. Daily exc Sun. 10.30am-2pm & 5pm-8pm. Until 3 Jan.

Hassan Ali Ahmed
Espace Gallery, 1 El-Sherifein St, Downtown. Tel 393 1699. Daily exc Fri, 10am-2pm & 6pm-9pm. Until 8 Jan.

Art Fair
Donia Gallery, 20 Abdel-Aziz Gawish St, across Mohamed Mahmoud St, Doctors' Tower, no 405. Tel 355 8367. Daily exc Fri, 12pm-9pm. Until 9 Jan.

Collective Exhibition
Khan El-Maghraby Gallery, 18 El-Mansour Mohamed St, Zamalek. Tel 340 3349. Daily 10.30am-3pm & 4pm-8.30pm. Until 9 Jan.
Featuring works by Amany Mahdy, Samir Shawki, Shamseddin El-Koronfily, Omar Abdel-Zaher, among other.

Esmat Dawestashi (Paintings & Sculptures)
Mashrabiya Gallery, *8 Champollion St, off Tahrir Sq. Tel 578 4494. Daily 11am-8pm. Until 16 Jan.*

Susan Osgood (Paintings)
Cairo-Berlin Gallery, 17 Youssef El-Guindi St, Bab El-Louk. Tel 393 1764. Daily exc Sun. 12pm-8pm. Until 21 Jan.

Constantin Xenakis
El-Hanager, Opera House Grounds, Gezira. Tel 355 1871. Daily 10am-9pm. 5-30 Jan.
Restrospective exhibition (1958-1996).

Sixth Cairo International Biennale
Cairo Opera Gallery, second floor, Opera House Grounds, Gezira. Tel 342 0592. Daily 10am-8pm. Until 15 March.

The Museum of Mr and Mrs Mohamed Mahmoud Khalil
1 Kafour El-Akhshid St, Dokki. Tel 336 2376. Daily exc Mon, 10am-6pm.
Egypt's largest collection of nineteenth century European art, amassed by the late Mahmoud Khalil, including works by Courbet, Van Gogh, Gauguin, and Rodin and a host of impressionist works, housed in the villa once belonging to the Khalils and converted into a museum with little, if any, expense spared.

Egyptian Museum
Tahrir Sq, Downtown. Tel 575 4319. Daily exc Fri, 8am-5pm; Fri 9am-11.15am & 1pm-3pm.
The world's largest collection of Pharaonic and Ptolemaic treasures, including massive granite statues and the smallest household objects used by the ancient Egyptians, along with, of course, the controversial mummies room.

Coptic Museum
Mar Girgis, Old Cairo. Tel 362 8766. Daily exc Fri, 9am-4pm; Fri 9am-11am & 1pm-3pm.
Founded in 1910, the museum houses a distinguished collection of Coptic art and artefacts, including textiles, manuscripts, icons and architectural features in a purpose built structure in the heart of the Coptic city.

Islamic Museum
Port Said St, Ahmed Maher St, Bab El-Khalq. Tel 390 9930/390 1520. Daily exc Fri, 9am-4pm; Fri 9am-11.30am & 2pm-4pm.
A vast collection of Islamic arts and crafts including *mashrabiya*, lustreware ceramics, textiles, woodwork, coins and manuscripts drawn from Egypt's Fatimid, Ayyubid and Mameluke periods and other countries in the Islamic world.

Museum of Modern Egyptian Art
Opera House Grounds, Gezira. Tel 340 6861. Daily exc Mon, 10am-1pm & 5pm-9pm.
A permanent display of paintings and sculpture charting the modern art movement in Egypt from its earliest pioneers to latest practitioners. A state of the art museum housing the contemporary art of the state.

Mohamed Nagui Museum
Château Pyramids, 9 Mahmoud Al-Guindi St, Giza.
A museum devoted to the paintings of Mohamed Nagui (1888-1956), the Alexandrian aristocrat who is considered one of the pioneers of the modern Egyptian art movement.

Mahmoud Mukhtar Museum
Tahrir St, Gezira. Daily exc Sun and Mon, 9am-1.30pm.
A permanent collection of works by the sculptor Mahmoud Mukhtar (d. 1934), whose granite monument to Saad Zaghloul stands near Qasr El-Nil Bridge, and whose Egypt Awakening became, somewhat belatedly, an icon of post revolutionary Egypt.

FILMS

Commercial cinemas change their programmes every Monday. The information provided is valid through to Sunday after which it is wise to check with the cinemas. Arabic films are seldom subtitled. For information, contact the venue.

El-Jentel (The Gentleman)
Tiba II, Nasr City. Tel 262 9407. Daily 10.30am, 3.30pm, 6.30pm & 9.30pm. Roxy, Roxy Sq, Heliopolis. Tel 258 0344. Daily 10am, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. Diana Palace, 17 El-Alfi St, Emadeddin, Downtown. Tel 924 727. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm 6pm & 9pm. Rivoli I, 26 July St, Downtown. Tel 575 5053. Daily 1pm, 3.3pm, 6.30pm & 9.30pm.
Mahmoud Abdel-Aziz, Poussi and Elham Shahin play it for laughs.

Elaqat Mashbouha (Illicit Liaisons)
Miami, 38 Talaat Harb St, Downtown. Tel 574 5656. Daily noon, 3.30pm, 5.30pm & 8.30pm.

Nazwa (The Fling)
Rivoli II, 26th July St, Downtown. Tel 575 5053. Daily 1pm, 3.30pm, 6.30pm, 8pm & 10pm. Cosmos I, 12 Emadeddin St, Downtown. Tel 779 537. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm.

Flipper
Tahrir, 112 Tahrir St, Dokki. Tel 335 5726. Daily 3pm, 6pm & 9pm.

Secret Agent Club: Hulk Hogan
Tahrir, 112 Tahrir St, Dokki. Tel 335 5726. Thur & Sat midnight show.

Surviving Picasso
Cairo Sheraton, Galaa St, Giza. Tel 360 6081. Daily 10.30am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm, 9pm & midnight.

Le Huitième Jour
Normandy, 31 El-Ahram St, Heliopolis. Tel 250 0254. Daily 12.30pm, 3.30pm, 6.30pm & 9.30pm.

Collective Exhibition Khan El-Maghraby Gallery

Dangerous Minds
Lido, 23 Emadeddin St, Downtown. Tel 934 284. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm.

Miami Rhapsody
El-Salam, 65 Abdel-Hamid Badawi St, Heliopolis. Tel 293 1072. Daily 3.30pm, 6.30pm & 9.30pm.

The Rock
Tiba I, Nasr City. Tel 262 9407. Daily 10.30am, 3.30pm, 6.30pm & 9.30pm.

The Crow
Cosmos II, 12 Emadeddin St, Downtown. Tel 779 537. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm

Diabolique
Karim II, 15 Emadeddin St, Downtown. Tel 924 830. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm.

Fled
Metro, 35 Talaat Harb St, Downtown. Tel 393 3897. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm.

The Quick and The Dead
El-Horreya I, El-Horreya Mall, Roxy, Heliopolis. Daily 1pm, 3pm, 6pm, & 9pm. Ramsis Hilton II, Corniche El-Nil St. Tel 574 7436. Daily 10.30am, 1.30pm, 3.30pm, 6.30pm & 9.30pm.

The House of The Spirits
Radio, 24 Talaat Harb St, Downtown. Tel 575 6562. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm.

The Nutty Professor
Ramsis Hilton I, Corniche El-Nil St. Tel 574 7436. Daily 10.30am, 1.30pm, 3.30pm, 6.30pm, 9.30pm. El-Horreya II, El-Horreya Mall, Roxy, Heliopolis. Daily 1.30am, 1pm, 3.30pm, 6.30pm, & 9.30pm.

Jingle All The Way
MGM, Maadi Grand Mall, Kolleyat El-Nasr Sq, Maadi. Tel 352 3066. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. El-Haram, Pyramids Road, Giza. Tel 385 8358. Daily 10.30am, 1.30pm, 3.30pm, 6.30pm, 9.30pm.

Chain Reaction
Karim I, 15 Emadeddin St, Downtown. Tel 924 830. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm.

MUSIC

Anas El-Wogoud
Main Hall, Opera House, Gezira. Tel 341 2926. 5-10 Jan, 8pm.
Performed by the Cairo Opera Company and Orchestra, conducted by Youssef El-Sissi.

National Arabic Music Ensemble
Small Hall, Opera House, as above. 2 Jan, 8pm.
Conducted by Selim Sahab.

Akhnaton Chamber Orchestra
Small Hall, Opera House, as above. 3 Jan, 8pm.

The Egyptian Musical Youth Ensemble
Small Hall, Opera House, as above. 4 Jan, 8pm.

Piano Recital
Small Hall, Opera House, as above. 5 Jan, 8pm.
Performed by Iman Sami.

Song Recital
Small Hall, Opera House, as above. 7 Jan, 8pm.

DANCE

Nutcracker
Main Hall, Opera House, Gezira. Tel 341 2926. 27-30 Dec, 8pm.
Performed by the Cairo Opera Ballet Company, directed by Abdel-Moneim Kamel.

THEATRE

El-Hares (The Guard)
Abdel-Rehim El-Zerqani Hall, Ezbekiya Theatre. Tel 591 7783. Daily 6pm.
Directed by Mohamed Abdel-Hadi.

Hekmat Hanem...Almaz?
George Abiad Hall, Ezbekiya Theatre, as above. Daily 9pm.

Dastoor Ya Siadna (With Your Permission, Masters)
El-Fann Theatre, Nadi El-Musiqa St, Ramsis. Tel 578 2444. Daily 8.30pm.

Ballo (Fanfare)
Madinet Nasr Theatre, Youssef Abbas St, Madinet Nasr. Tel 402 0804. Daily 8.30pm; Thur 10pm.
Starring Salah El-Saadani, directed by Samir El-Asfouri.

El-Ganzir (The Chain)
El-Salam Theatre, Qasr El-Aini. Tel 355 2484. Daily exc Mon, 9pm.

Ka'b 'Ali (High Heels)
Radio Theatre, 4 Talaat Harb St, Downtown. Tel 578 4910. Daily 8pm, Wed & Thur 10pm.

El-Zaim (The Leader)
El-Haram Theatre, Pyramids Road, Giza. Tel 386 3952. Daily 8pm, Wed & Thus, 10pm.

Genoun El-Banat (The Madness Of Girls)
Mohamed Farid Theatre, Emadeddin St. Tel 770 603. Daily 8pm.

El-Fares El-Asmar (The Dark Knight)
Puppet Theatre, Ataba Sq. Tel 591 0954. Thur-Sun 6.30pm; Fri & Sun 11am.

LECTURE

Medicine in Ancient Egypt
British Council, 192 El-Nil St, Agouza. Tel 301 0319. 6 Jan, 7pm.

Lecture by Hamdy El-Refay, medical management consultant, diploma of medical history.

Dakhleh Oasis Project: Recent Researches
Polish Centre of Mediterranean Archaeology in Cairo, 11 Mahalla St, Heliopolis. Tel 415 6278. 7 Jan, 6pm.
Lecture by Anthony Mills, director of the Dakhleh Oasis Project.

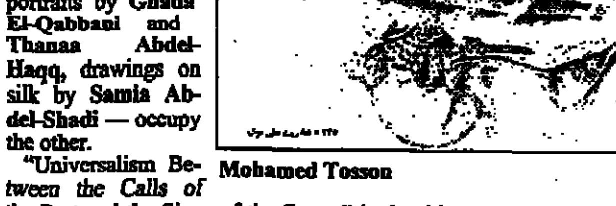
All information correct at time of going to press. However, it remains wise to check with venues first, since programmes, dates and times are subject to change at very short notice.
Please telephone or send information to Listings, *Al-Ahram Weekly*, Galaa St, Cairo.
Tel 5786064.

Compiled by **Injy El-Kashef**

Around the galleries

FOUR artists exhibit their work at **Cairo Atelier**. Calligraphic works by **Mohamed Tosson** occupy one gallery, while the works of three women — pastel still-lifes, landscapes and portraits by **Ghada El-Qabbani** and **Thanaa Abdel-Haqq**, drawings on silk by **Samia Abdel-Shadi** — occupy the other.





Mohamed Tosson

"Universalism Between the Calls of the Past and the Signs of the Future" is the title of the **Sixth Cairo Biennale** at the **Centre of Arts, Zamalek**. The title itself is indicative of the Biennale's recent tendency to promote an "internationalist" aesthetic idiom and to marginalise that which is local and traditional. This tendency manifests itself in the favouring of certain genres, for example the installation, over others such as pottery. Inspite of this, there are many works worth noting: the village scene by **Christos Foukaras** (Cyprus), the allegorical painting of motherhood by **Kamel Mahmoud Kamel** (Palestine) and the painting of the *nay* (flute) player by **Ahmed Morsi** (Egypt/US).

Reviewed by **Nagwa El-Ashri**

Man for all seasons

The Renaissance, Tharwat Okasha. UAE: El-Seweidi, 1996

For many years now Tharwat Okasha has been engaged in a mammoth project, an ambitious attempt to provide, in Arabic, a comprehensive, multi-volume history of art. In this, the 20th volume of the series, he deals with the Renaissance, providing an encyclopeadic overview of a period the profound implications of which continue to inform our daily lives.

Okasha's execution of the task he has set himself is exemplary. It is no mean feat to provide the necessary context in which the development of *quattrocento* Italian painting can be readily understood. The period that saw the emergence of Giotto, the ground breaking work of Mantegna, Donatello, Verrocchio — who was for a time the teacher of Leonardo — Raphael, Leonardo himself, Botticelli, through to the late, increasingly mannered works of Michelangelo, requires less explanation than erudite exegesis. The period, and the significance of the artefacts it produced, can make little sense without foregrounding the conditions that allowed the emergence, during the late 14th century, of the artist rather than the artisan, a figure who, during the next 100 years, was to be transformed into the creative genius.

And therein lies the rub. For the Italian Renaissance was, for want of a better metaphor, really no more than a crucible, an incredible melting pot in which a multitude of elements were mixed and, hey presto, out came man, at the centre of his universe. Only of course it was not quite that simple. The problem with a great many histories of the period is that they tend to concentrate on the icing, on the formal, technical qualities of the art produced, without really giving that much consideration to the actual body of the cake, the conditions that allowed for this production. Thus, one can pick up a monograph on Mantegna, and become familiar with the intricacies of medieval optical theory. Art historians have expended vast amounts of energy on analysing the radical technical innovations of Leonardo, on discerning the exact ingredients of the distemper that allowed *The Last Supper* to begin deteriorating almost before it was finished, the calculations Verrocchio employed in casting the first full sized equestrian statue, or in reconstructing the grid structure that allowed Ucello to place foreshortened corpses on the end of his lances.

While *The Renaissance* is more than happy to follow such leads, it also serves as an essential introduction to the cultural climate that allowed such innovations to proliferate. Okasha, wisely, does not stint on providing the relevant framework — the social and economic conditions that allowed specific patterns of patronage to evolve. He is perfectly right in doing so since, in the end, the papacy of Julius II is far more important to the career of Raphael than his stylistic debts, in the painting of female faces, to Ghirlandio.

Bravely, Okasha begins with St Francis of Assisi — or more precisely Giotto's version of St Francis — and moves steadily towards the unravelling of an iconography that reaches its climax, perhaps, in the allegories of Botticelli, an iconography that might fairly be described as heretical, or at the very least, anti-orthodox. How could this have happened, in the Catholic states of Italy? In providing the relevant political histories of Florence and of Rome Okasha plots that period of transition that is best exemplified by the most iconic image of European art, da Vinci's Mona Lisa — a placid, quizzically smiling figure foregrounded against a sinister landscape. Only half a century earlier Mona Lisa would have known her place. She would have been cowed by her surroundings. Nature, not an enigmatic smile, would have dominated. In God's universe there would have been little for fallen humanity to smile about anyway. And from the Mona Lisa it is but a small step to the ultimate, the most bravura statement of Renaissance humanism, Michelangelo's David. Here nature does not even exist. Man has taken possession of his universe, and the world has been redrawn.

The Renaissance is a beautifully produced volume, richly illustrated with reproductions of the most significant artworks of the period — paintings, sculpture, and of course architecture. San Croce, and Brunellesco's work in Florence, Donatello's sculptures and bas reliefs, the works of Fra Angelico and Luca della Robbia, indeed of all the artists who contributed to the epoch, are beautifully presented, as the story moves inexorably towards the towering achievements of Michelangelo in Rome, and the dawning realisation that, having taken possession of the world, David will have to watch his step.

Dr Okasha is to be congratulated on what is quite obviously a labour of love. And in this, his twentieth volume, he has provided a comprehensive and illuminating introduction to a period whose reverberations continue to be felt in all four corners of the globe.

Reviewed by **Mursi Saad El-Din**



At the centre of the universe: Michelangelo's study for the *Battle of Cascina* and, right, Raphael's *Miraculous Draught of Fishes*. The two artists are at the core of Tharwat Okasha's study of the Renaissance, which was published last week

An intimate Palestine

***A Land of Stone and Thyme: An Anthology of Palestinian Short Stories*, eds. Nur and Abdelwahab Elmessiri. London: Quartet Books, 1996**

There is a strange paradox regarding the portrayal of events in mass media. With one image, picture, or article, the reader or the viewer can be made to feel transported to a particular site and a sense of connection can be established between the observer and the event. On the other hand, however, the repetition of like images or similar subjects can have the exact opposite effect: the reader or viewer can be made to feel his or her distance from a particular site, while the sense of connection can be lost to a feeling of passive observation. Such is the case with both tragic and triumphal events, from famines and wars to celebrations and triumphs. Such is the case with the portrayal of Palestine.

The very name Palestine has become embedded in a language of politics and lost in a sea of loaded terms such as "struggle", "oppression", "resistance", "injustice"... etc. To express this in different terms, a name denoting a specific place and people has been transformed into a word synonymous with ethereal notions and ideas, depriving the former of the power to speak for itself. Even specific images of unarmed young men throwing stones at heavily-armed soldiers no longer speak with the same force and resonance as they did eight years ago. It is in such an environment that literature assumes a crucial role — that of humanising what has been lost in the jargon of politics and media snapshots. Through literature, while the political backdrop remains constant, we the readers are made to confront and consider the lives and experiences of individuals.

In *A Land of Stone and Thyme*, as an anthology of short stories, the reader is confronted with numerous voices, numerous experiences, and numerous lives, all of which defy easy collectivisation or generalisation. This, in many ways, can be said to be the purpose of the anthology. Because of the realities of the political situation, there is a strong tendency to brand any literature that comes out of Palestine or from Palestinian writers living abroad immediately as "resistance literature." As with any pre-defined and limited category, the reader might then approach the work with his or her own preconceived notion of the subject matter and the direction that the work should take. While an anthology may not remove the umbrella term of "resistance literature," it offers the reader the alternative of approaching these stories as a kaleidoscope. They may all be concerned with experiences related to resistance or occupation, but they need not deal with these issues directly as such.

By grouping these stories into six sections, the editors make their intentions clear: "Read as a unified whole, in order of appearance, the short stories of this anthology combine to form a myth and are each a facet of a meta-narrative or framework which has been imposed upon them... These [six sections], read in sequence, tell a single story". The anthology becomes a text in itself. From the opening section, "Shadows of Paradise Lost", to the final, "Dream of Paradise Redeemed", the numerous stories are interwoven to form a single narrative of the Palestinian experience — from the depths of helplessness and humiliation to the possibility of rejuvenation through imagination. Despite the ability of the anthology to speak as a narrative in and of itself, it is the format of grouping numerous and varied stories into single sections or chapters that creates the thread which allows the reader to make sense out of the myriad of voices which might otherwise seem unrelated, if not for their point of origin.

The plot of the anthology is contained within the narrative structure of the sections: beginning with the loss of the homeland, remembered nostalgically and sentimentally as Paradise, the former inhabitants are forced into a harsh exile, one which is, however, tempered by a continued sense of community and the presumed temporary nature of their exile. By the third section, both the sense of community and optimism have crumbled away, as many refugees now find themselves alone in distant and unwelcoming environs like Cairo, Tunis, and Beirut. In the fourth section, aptly titled "Babel," the 'simple' sense of loss, displacement, and isolation is replaced by the view of a world seemingly gone mad, a view in which the magical and nonsensical consume reality to the extent that the political backdrop is barely visible, if at all. Out of this madness, death becomes, in the fifth section, the central figure, both as oppressor and savior, skewing the sense of time so that it can no longer be conveyed by a simply linear portrayal of events. In the final section, which brings both subject and object around full circle, the possibility of reclaiming or regaining Paradise is allowed to return. The manifold trials and self-contemplation have created this possibility, assuring, however, that Paradise will never be the same.

Discussing these sections as cohesive groupings of stories with common themes, protagonists and settings belies the extreme diversity among these stories, even those in the same section. The range of antagonists in these stories, to note but one example, assumes the broadest spectrum possible, from time, other Arab leaders, President Nixon and identity papers, to a snake, a son who has forgotten his father, loneliness and impassable borders. Notably absent from this abbreviated list is the mention of Zionists and settlers one might expect to find. Although they appear or are mentioned both directly and indirectly in some of the stories, their role has become almost secondary. The struggle for Palestinians to define themselves has become a self-reflective process. No longer willing to define themselves only in opposition to other peoples and forces, most of these stories turn their focus deeply inwards. The editors attribute this shift to the maturing of a new generation of Palestinian writers from the 1960s onwards.

Many of the Palestinian stories appearing after 1948 were very sentimental in tone and overly concerned with the political, which "proved to be confining since it restricted the writers to a merely political dimension of reality or to a morbid and at times maudlin obsession with national woes". It was only with the new generation of writers who appeared in the 1960s (though still heavily influenced by their literary forebears) that the Palestinian short story began to mature and achieve artistic sophistication. In these later short stories, drawing on their authors' own experiences and those of their colleagues in the Diaspora, the sentimentality of earlier works was replaced by a shift inwards. The result is the wealth of voices, styles, and images which the reader is presented with in this anthology. It is an opportunity to look beyond the headlines, the loaded language of politics and the redundant images and to listen to the voices and visualise the images of individuals coming to terms with their own past and experiences.

Reviewed by **Karim Amer**

Plain Talk

In recent weeks Cairo has been the venue for a number of symposia and seminars, confirming its position as the cultural capital of the Arab world. The symposia, however, were not just of regional but of international importance and were attended by many academics from abroad.

First there was the conference on Arabic poetry, which was the brainchild of the Higher Council of Culture. It was attended by leading poets from across the Arab world. Indeed the seminars which the conference comprised dealt with many perennial questions that have dogged poetic practice for decades now. The usual conflicting views of innovators and traditionalists were expressed at the many meetings and, as usual, no conclusion was reached.

A seminar was also held on the work of Mohamed Hussein Heikal, generally regarded as the father of the Egyptian novel. This too was organised by the Higher Council of Culture and was attended by many notable academics including Roger Owen. Dr Owen, who read his paper in impeccable Arabic, presented an ingenious mix of Arab and Western critical discourses.

The third international symposium on comparative literature, organised by the English department of the Faculty of Arts, Cairo University, was an event that gave me particular pleasure to attend. I was myself a student of the English section between 1939 and 1943 and attending sessions in lecture theatre number 13 brought back a flood of memories of those bygone days when that very room served as my classroom. When I returned from England in 1956, I lectured in the same theatre on Chekov and Tennyson. Indeed, many of the current staff members at the faculty, including Dr Mohamed Enani and Dr Salwa Kamel, both of whom were instrumental in organising the international symposium, were my students.

I was delighted to be invited to take part in panel discussions, and particularly pleased to meet the American novelist Richard Ford, winner of the 1996 Pulitzer Prize and the PEN/Faulkner Prize, a double first never before achieved. His prize-winning novel, *Independance Day*, which deals with contemporary life in America, has been described by one critic as "the definitive novel of the post-war generation".

I had the pleasure of accompanying Ford to a number of negagements and introduced him at the talk he gave at the Mubarak Library on the spirit of place. On this occasion, it was interesting to observe the responses of the audience as he read one of his short stories. The reading was followed by a question and answer session which covered regional politics as well as more literary subjects.

His most interesting engagement, though, proved to be an informal meeting with Egyptian writers at the Writers' Union. I always find such encounters between practitioners of the same trade who come from different cultures particularly fascinating.

Mursi Saad El-Din

Ottomans and others

Mahmoud El-Wardani reviews the most interesting titles to have appeared in the past month

•*Al-Khibaa'* (The Tent), Miral El-Tahawi. Cairo: Dar Sharqiyat, 1996
Miral El-Tahawi's first novel, *Al-Khibaa'* (The Tent), is set in the desert — a site of perpetual migration and return, seen through the eyes of a little girl. If her first novel is anything to go by, El-Tahawi has shown remarkable skills at reading the poetics of space, and of the myths they spell.

•*Al-A'mal Il-Kamila, Saad Mikkawi* (The Complete Works of Saad Mikkawi), vol 6, Saad Mikkawi. Cairo: General Egyptian Book Organisation, 1996
The late Saad Mikkawi's sixth volume of fiction contains three collections of short stories: *Al-Raqs Ala Al-Ushb Al-Akhdar* (Dancing on Green Grass), *Abwab Al-Layl* (Gates of the Night) and *Al-Fagr Yazour Al-Hadiqa* (Dawn Visits the Garden). Interestingly, these allegedly "complete" works are not prefaced by a study and come with no bibliography or biographical notes about the author. Worse still, the editors seem to have found no reason to cite the dates of the first editions of the three collections reprinted here.

•*Bayn Alamayn: Rigaal Al-Aamal Al-Filistinioun Fil-Shataat* (Between Two Worlds: Palestinian Businessmen in the Diaspora), Sari Hanafi. Cairo: Dar El-Mustaqbal El-Arabi, 1996
The author of this valuable study, a researcher at the Centre d'etudes economiques et juridiques (CEDEJ) in Cairo, has done well to steer away from preconceptions about the topic and focus instead on field work. He has interviewed 250 Palestinian businessmen living in the diaspora — in Egypt, Syria, Jordan, the Emirates, Lebanon, France, Britain, Canada and the US.

The book addresses the following questions: what economic and financial opportunities are offered these businessmen; what is the nature of the relationship between these businessmen and their host countries; what is the extent of the participation of this economic elite living abroad in the political decision-making of Palestinians; what, if any, networks link these businessmen to each other and to their counterparts in the West Bank and Gaza.

•*Kitabat Dr Nasr Abu Zeid Fi Mizan Sahih Al-Islam* (The Writings of Dr Nasr Hamed Abu Zeid in the Balance of Orthodox Islam), Khalil Abdel-Kerim. Cairo: Dar Qadaya Fikriya Lil-Nashr Wal-Tawzi, 1996
The author of this book, lawyer and thinker Khalil Abdel-Kerim, was on the committee for the defence of Arabic literature professor Nasr Hamed Abu Zeid, against whom an apostasy charge was levelled, calling for his divorce from his wife, French literature professor Ibtihal Salem. The book includes an exegetical study, written by Abdel-Kerim, that was meant to be submitted to the Court of Cassation, as was agreed by the defence committee. But, as it turned out, the study was never presented to the Court of Cassation.

Subjecting the writings of Abu Zeid to rigorous scrutiny with the aim of settling once and for all the question whether he is guilty of apostasy, Abdel-Kerim assesses his work in the light of the strict criteria set by the founders of the four schools of Islamic jurisprudence. Abdel-Kerim concludes that Abu Zeid is innocent of all the charges brought against him by the court of appeals and, later, the court of cassation.

The significance of this exoneration comes from the fact that Abdel-Kerim is a highly respected authority on Islamic issues, about which he has written several tomes.

•*Al-Tarikh Wa Kayfa Yufassirunuh* (The Interpretations of History), Allan Widgery, tr Abdel-Aziz Tewfiq Gawid. Cairo: General Egyptian Book Organisation, 1996
In the first, introductory section of this hefty volume, Allan Widgery grazes through all the major civilisations that have marked humanity, charting their view of history. Thus he takes us through Greece and Rome, through China, Persia, India and the Arabian Peninsula. In the second section of the book, the author ponders historiographic trends from the Renaissance to the nineteenth century, giving an in-depth analysis of the philosophy of history.

•*Ayam Selim Al-Awal Fi Masr* (The Days of Selim I in Egypt), Helmi El-Nimnim. Cairo: Dar Al-Nahr, 1996
Though the eight-month period the author has chosen to study may at first sight indicate too limited a scope for research, the months in question were those that changed the face of Egypt in years of yore. For these were the eight months spent by Sultan Selim I in Egypt after he conquered the country, during which time he proceeded to lay the foundations of Ottoman rule.

In the introduction, Helmi El-Nimnim explains that writing a historical study was not what he had in mind. Rather, he wanted to read through a particular, highly significant, moment in Egypt's history. Those who weep over the days of the Ottoman Empire, he says, are not only overlooking the barbarous practices the Ottomans wreaked upon their Egyptian subjects, but also ignoring the very real, very prolonged, struggle of these subjects to overthrow the yoke.

Drawing for his narrative on the contemporary account of historian Ibn Iyass, El-Nimnim supplies ample evidence to endorse his argument. Sultan Selim I, we are reminded, took back to Turkey the cream of Egypt's artisans and craftsmen. But before his departure he had, among other things, ransacked the best libraries, burnt to the ground some of the most important mosques and vandalised the Citadel.

•*Nazarat Fil-Nafs Wal-Haya* (Insights into the Soul and into Life), Abdel-Rahman Shukri, ed Abdel-Fattah El-Shatti. Cairo: General Egyptian Book Organisation, 1996
A pioneer rarely recalled in the regularly held commemorative celebrations, Abdel-Rahman Shukri was — together with El-Aqqad and El-Mazni — a founding member of Al-Diwan school of poetry and criticism. His articles, reprinted in this book, were first published in the Cairene magazine *Al-Muqtataf* between 1947 and 1951. As seen in the book, Shukri was an avid reader of works by Europe's key figures in the fields of philosophy and literature. In this collection are writings on Schopenhauer, Anatole France, Proust, Swift, Goethe, Thackeray and Balzac. Indeed, the one Arab he includes in this pantheon is Ibn Al-Muqafaa.

The book has been well-served by the revisions and annotations of its editor, Abdel-Fattah El-Shatti.

•*Kitab Al-Namima, Nubalaa Wa Awbash* (The Book of Gossip: Of Noble Men and Rogues), Sulaiman Fayyad. Cairo: Markaz Al-Dirasat Wal-Maloumat Al-Qanouniya Li-Hiqouq Al-Insan, 1996
This, the first volume of novelist Sulaiman Fayyad's "Book of Gossip" consists of 13 portraits of intellectuals, some noble, some rogues, who lived in Egypt in the second half of the twentieth century, some of whom are still among us. The aim of this exercise, Fayyad informs us in the introduction, is to present an eye-witness account of an age of nobility and cheapness, of authenticity and falsehoods, and to remind a few people that they are not, in fact, more intelligent than others, and that their past has not been forgotten. Although Fayyad does not disclose the names of the characters he describes, it does not take great intelligence to hit upon their true identity.

•*Nashid Orok* (The Song of Orok), Adnan Al-Saigh. Lebanon: Dar Amwag, 1996
This epic by Iraqi poet Adnan Al-Saigh is in fact the lengthiest in all Arabic poetry. Several publishing houses in the Arab world have turned it down, not on account of its length but due to the daring, subversive nature of the content. Indeed, the poem has caused such trouble to its author that he has been chased out of several countries. Al-Saigh, it is to be noted, won the Hellman-Hammett award for victims of persecution and censorship.

Hand in hand

Are traditional handicrafts on the decline? A festival aiming to revive them may help remedy the deterioration of centuries-old techniques. Rania Khallaf reports

Cairo was the cultural capital of the Arab world for 1996 and, in this spirit, efforts are being made to boost the culture and crafts for which the Arabs were once renowned. A three-day seminar held during the festival for Islamic art and architecture called for practical steps to be taken towards the establishment of an Arab fund for traditional handicrafts. The inauguration ceremony, at Wikalet El-Ghouri in the old district of Al-Azhar, was held amidst exhibitions of traditional crafts like *mashrabiya*, brass work, stained glass, jewellery, handwoven carpets and decorative textiles. Combining modern techniques with traditional products, there was a fashion show of beautiful, brightly-hued *galabiyas*, made in the workshops affiliated to the *wikala*. The show featured almost extinct *galabiya* designs, bringing together rare styles from such different governorates as the oases and Sinai.

Mohamed Ghoneim, head of the Department of Foreign Cultural Relations at the Ministry of Culture, said that the festival aims to highlight the fact that Arab handicrafts are able to keep pace with changes in contemporary life.

Participants from Lebanon, Syria, Palestine, Morocco, Tunisia, Yemen and Libya called for the establishment of an Arab fund for the development of traditional handicrafts. They recommended that this fund be financed through donations from member countries as well as Arab and foreign aid, local banks and development funds. Experts attending the festival discussed the situation of traditional handicrafts in their respective countries and pondered ways to remove the obstacles facing artisans throughout the Arab world.

Mohamed Hossameddin, representative of the Syrian Ministry of Culture, said that the Syrian government supports the production of local handicrafts, especially mosaics, wood and iron objects, and stained glass. He suggested that the government was the best-equipped to provide artisans with direct financial support. Artisans have few chances to participate in international exhibitions, and he argued that opportunities for "cooperation and exchange among Arab countries should be organised more frequently.

In Yemen, artisans are feeling the crunch. Insufficient funds, inappropriate workshops, scarce raw materials and weak markets have all contributed to the deterioration of the craftspeople's situation — and, with it, the art for which they are famous. Gamal Kushih, director-general of the General Centre for Traditional Crafts, which coordinates artisanal production throughout the country, noted: "The Centre has recently established a separate branch for women's crafts which helped to revive the creation of Yemeni silver jewellery, and helped women to increase their income." Some 5,000 students have graduated from the centre and received financial support allowing them to open their own workshops.

Another problem facing traditional handicrafts is mass production. "Many handicrafts were beginning to vanish because of the competition from Taiwan and other Asian countries. The Centre will revive these crafts. We have been able to open markets in Italy, Germany, Iraq and Saudi Arabia," Kushih said.

Faika Siba'i, a representative of the Lebanese Ministry of Culture, said the situation of handicrafts in Lebanon is unique, due to the fact that the war has devastated the economy as a whole. "The Lebanese government has launched a new project to develop handicrafts. Our aim is to link handicrafts with society's needs, not to rely solely on production for tourism," Siba'i said, citing the need to provide employment and revive Lebanon's heritage. Essam Badr, the Palestinian Ministry of Culture's consultant for traditional handicrafts, said that a new national organisation for developing traditional industries will be soon established in the Palestinian territories. Artisans are still suffering the impact of frequent Israeli closures, however, and are obliged to deal with Israeli distributors who impose very low purchasing prices. In some cases, he said, Palestinian products are exported as Israeli products. Gaza's 30-odd pottery workshops are all closed because of the Israeli government's economic policies. Skilled artisans are forced to seek employment as construction workers. Badr urged Arab economic and cultural organisations to provide traditional Palestinian industries with financial assistance, training, and opportunities for technical cooperation. This would help preserve the Arab and Palestinian identity of Galilee and Jerusalem and provide employment to Palestinians.

Foreign fashion

Zeinab Abul-Gheit examines changes in women's fashion since the French occupation

Years of occupation by foreign powers — Turkey, France and Britain — left their mark on Egypt in many aspects of life, not least the clothes women wore.

Before the arrival of the French in 1798, Egyptian women, particularly from the upper classes, wore clothes similar to those of the Turks and the Mamelukes, based on layer upon layer of garments.

The *shintian* was a wide garment worn under a tight cotton *qamis* (blouse-like gown). It was made of silk, part of it ended with leg coverings that tied around the knees; another part reached to the ground. The *qamis* was worn under the *yalak* and above the *shintian*. It covered the higher part of the chest, had wide sleeves and was made of pale coloured silk or other fine fabric and often decorated with gold embroidery.

The *qamis* could be seen through the opening of the *yalak* at the breast and through the openings of the *yalak*'s sleeves. The *yalak* was worn tight on the body until under the breast; then it opened at the front and sometimes on both sides. Its sleeves were tight until the elbow and then cut open, sometimes hanging to the feet, and allowing the sleeves of the *qamis* to appear between the elbow and wrist.

On top of the *yalak*, women wore a silk or muslin belt, and the outfit was topped by a cashmere shawl in winter. The *gibba* (a hooded gown) was worn on the garments mentioned above. Women also wore a *taqiyya* (skullcap) embroidered with silver or gold thread. The rich woman used to wrap a *rabta*, a kind of scarf, around the *taqiyya*.

Poor women's clothes were obviously simpler, but also based on the principle of layers of long, voluminous garments. Brightly-coloured house dresses would be covered with a *sabra*, a very wide gown, and topped with a *habra* outside the house. The *habra* was similar to a coat, and made of black silk covering all parts of the body. It was worn by both Muslim and Christian women for modesty. Married women wore black; unmarried women, white. Those who could not afford to buy the silk *habra*, wore instead a blue cotton *milaya*.

The most popular fabric at the time was a mixture of cotton and silk. A variation, known as *shahi*, contained a higher percentage of cotton to silk and was sold for half the price.

According to records kept at the time of the French occupation, there were 35 textile factories in Cairo, manufacturing various kinds of silk and cotton. Other factories used the fabric to make curtains, tablecloths, furniture coverings, headkerchiefs and shirts. Embroidery was also a thriving craft, and one that Egyptians excelled at in the 18th and 19th centuries. Embroiderers were known as *al-goubougueh*; those who embroidered with silver or gold thread were called *al-gasabigyeh*.

Women's clothing did not undergo an immediate revolution with the arrival of the French. But upper class women saw the European clothes, and, gradually the idea of abandoning the traditional many-layered approach caught on. The French remained in Egypt for only three years, leaving in 1801. But change took place most rapidly in the mid-19th century. The *yalak*, the most visible of the garments worn inside the house became a closed dress, buttoned at the front but now fitting over the breast, instead of open. It became shorter, with sleeves ending at the wrist. The belt was abandoned. The *yalak* became shorter and its sleeves ended at the wrist. The *gibba* was also abandoned. The beautiful gold-embroidered fabrics were also abandoned as simplicity replaced extravagant decoration.



Not all women took to European fashion — *painting: Mahmoud Said*

A change took place in the headcover, with the disappearance of the *taqiyya* (skullcap) with dangling ornaments and of the jewel-encrusted scarf (*rabta*) wrapped around the head.

While some simplification of dress did take place in the 19th century, this is not to say that Egyptian women took on the dress of Europeans. Far from it. The *yalak*, *sabla* and *habra* were retained, albeit in a modified form, and a full veil, known as the *burqu'* was worn. Made of muslin and tied at the back of the head, it revealed the eyes only. Rich women wore stockings. So, when an Egyptian woman went out of her house, she was covered from head to toe.

If Egyptian women took some inspiration from the European occupiers, the same may also have been true of the reverse. It has been suggested by Mahasen Abdel-Mottaleb, a former professor at the Higher Institute for Home Economics, that the French actually appropriated Egyptian dress designs and claimed them as their own.

By the beginning of the 20th century, traditional Egyptian dress had begun to die out among the upper classes. Akila Khorba, 75, remembers her grandmother as being one of the first women in her family's circle to try the new European style. Living in Alexandria, her grandmother bought the fashions through the French department stores Galleries Lafayette and Printemps.

And as the century progressed, the desire for European clothes continued unabated. Mohamed Abdallah, director of the Roxy branch of Omar Effendi, said that before nationalisation, 40 years ago, women would choose their dresses from catalogues imported by the store from France. The dress was then made up either by foreign tailors employed by the store, or by sending the measurements to the Bon Marché, a French store to which Omar Effendi was affiliated. According to Abdallah, the cloth used was often Egyptian cotton, exported to France to be processed and then re-exported to Egypt, claiming to be French cloth.

The last decade has seen the emergence of Egyptian companies creating Egyptian-made clothes for fashion-conscious young people at prices affordable to the upper class and wealthier middle class. In the shops run by these companies the gap between Egyptian and European clothes has been more or less whittled away. And, for a large group of women, influenced by the Islamist trend emerging in the 1970s, choice of clothing is now governed more by the need to cover legs and arms and head than the demands of fashion. Some, of a class whose mothers wore European styles, have themselves retreated into something more like their great-grandmothers would have worn.

Pot Pourri

A spoonful of wisdom

The eating habits of small children often provoke permanent states of anxiety in mothers. Some will only consume certain foods, others binge, others still refuse to open wide and let in the airplane/train/you name it. A friend was telling me how he had adhered to a strict diet of mashed potatoes and hamburgers, no salad. Such eating disorders invariably fill parents with an indelible feeling of guilt. I am definitely one of these parents. I even feel guilty about my grandchildren's appetite for fast foods.

My first child refused to suckle. I felt an unworthy mother. Several paediatricians were consulted and advised putting her on the bottle. After a few gulps she would lose interest. It was something I was doing, I was sure, although I was at a loss to say what. Nevertheless I felt thoroughly depressed, while my husband made veiled allusions at the unhealthy influence of a certain international medical practitioner whose advice was so strange it sold far more books than solid common sense would have made possible.

By the time she was three, my daughter had grown into a little girl very similar to others her age. I, however, refused to see her as such and made the rounds of various paediatricians. Whenever one suggested that she was perfectly normal, I visited another. I usually favoured those who prescribed heavy doses of vitamins. My daughter took to throwing up. She was then given intramuscular doses, which gave her nightmares.

Meal times were like waiting for a bomb to go off. In the best of cases they degenerated into shouting matches, with the food left to coagulate on the table. I developed severe headaches and my husband stopped coming home for lunch. Intense tête-à-têtes, I pleaded, threatened and bribed — alas, to no avail. I dreaded weekends and family gatherings in general, with various members of the family trying their skills on the recalcitrant little girl.

We tried packed lunches and the outdoors. Neither beaches nor parks whetted her appetite. We returned exhausted from our encounters with nature, the delicious sandwiches having been consumed by ducks, birds or stray dogs according to the venue.

On our way back my husband would remember his own childhood and the way his mother had made him like okra by feeding it to him for a whole week three times a day. "Now it is my favourite dish," he would tell us, smiling at the fond memory of his mother's success. "And she never even read a book," he would add, a little spitefully I felt.

I kept my opinion of his mother in general and in this particular case to myself. After all, I was in no position to criticise her. Meanwhile I stuck to my guru's book and endlessly arranged slices of beetroot, tomatoes and carrots around pretty little mounds of green peas, topped with sprigs of parsley. I even tried rose petals. My daughter loved the decorative meal and engaged in redecoration of her own, sorting and mixing the items which never found their way to her mouth. She created landscapes with mashed potatoes interspersed with pieces of chicken, carrot skyscrapers and interesting faces with the raisins in her tapioca pudding.

Spanking was sometimes tried by my husband, in desperation and in contravention of all my guru's exhortations. At these moments he remembered conveniently that his mother had not been averse to corporal punishment. There was recurrent mentions of a certain umbrella she had once broken across his back. I threatened to leave.

We were deadlocked in a ridiculous drama in which the cause, food, was consumed in ever-decreasing quantities by all protagonists. At this point my sister-in-law came to visit. She had been living in the States and it was our first meeting. I had heard plenty of stories about her, though. She had spoiled her only daughter rotten, my husband's old aunts would tell all and sundry, casting a knowing glance my way, with the result that the poor child had made a disastrous marriage and undergone an equally painful divorce.

My sister-in-law had been left to care for three small grandsons while her daughter was in Europe trying to pull herself together. The little boys were being brought up almost militarily by their grandparents, who had learned their lesson.

On the first day of her arrival, the extended family took my sister-in-law to a famous restaurant she remembered from her Cairene days. My daughter, seated next to her, was piling grains of rice high on her plate, decorating her hillocks with trees made of sliced green beans. Suddenly my sister-in-law signalled to the waiter and handed him the child's plate, silencing his solicitous question with a "that will be all, thank you" that called for no further comments.

At first my daughter looked simply surprised but, when she realised that nothing more was forthcoming, her eyes filled with tears. I was furious. How dare this woman whom I hardly knew upset my daughter? I could hardly make a scene in front of the whole family. I gave her a dirty look. She winked at me pleasantly and kept talking.

"I'm hungry," wailed my daughter suddenly. She had never said that in her life before. She was ignored. Indignant, I was about to recall the waiter when my sister-in-law kicked me hard under the table. My hand stopped in mid-air. I looked at my husband. Busy with his fish, he was letting his sister do as she pleased.

Suddenly she leaned towards my daughter and whispered: "I know you hate food. I told your mother to stop feeding you." The look on my daughter's face alerted me to the fact that this was an historic moment. I forced myself to ignore her.

At dinner time, my sister-in-law authoritatively took my place, serving everyone and forgetting my daughter's plate. I looked the other way, my heart pounding. While the guests were complimenting me on my cooking, my daughter extended her plate. "Can I have some too, please," she asked politely. I can't claim that she took to binging from that day on, but meals became pleasant moments for our family.

Fayza Hassan

Sufra Dayma

Stuffed boneless lamb shoulder

Ingredients:

Boneless lamb shoulder
1/2kg minced meat
1 onion (grated)
1 bunch parsley (finely chopped)
1 bouillon cube
1 tbsp. corn flour
Butter
Salt + pepper + allspice + grated nutmeg

Method:

Blend the mince with the onion, parsley and season it. Season the boneless shoulder thoroughly, then place the minced meat over it, roll longitudinally, then tie a thread around it starting from one end. Melt the butter and smear it on the stuffed shoulder, then season again from the outside, only without salt. Place it inside a baking bag and into a medium preheated oven for about one hour. After removing it from the oven, leave to cool, remove the thread and slice. The residue left is to be cooked with the bouillon cube, plus the corn flour, dissolved in half a cup of cold water, then added to the sauce, until thickened. Serve the lamb meat with the sauce aside, some "sautéed" vegetables and fried noodles.

Moushira Abdel-Malek

Restaurant review

Sweet as cherry pie?

Nigel Ryan on assembly line baking

What makes a decent coffee shop? Well, there is coffee for starters, and cakes, and comfortable seating, and tables on which you can spread out and read and linger and generally pass the time, either alone or in company.

Upmarket coffee shops appear to be sprouting all over the place. The Marriott Bakery has recently opened two new branches, one in Mohandessin, the second in Maadi. The former is located in one of Cairo's ugliest parades of shops — very LA slum and, like great tracts of Mohandessin, garish. The ground floor serves as the bakery, while up a flight of wooden and pseudo-brass balustraded stairs is the first floor restaurant, tackily half-panelled, with wishy washy prints of mock impressionist watercolours on the walls, circular, polished granite tables and slightly uncomfortable chairs. It is, at best, a bland interior, the sort that you might associate with a high street chain department store or a catering concession at one of the larger London railway stations. It was also very chilly.

The service, though, is reasonably efficient, and the single wall of glass allows a view of whatever happens to be passing along Gameat Al-Duwal Al-Arabia, which is seldom fascinating, but which can be distracting. I went to the Bakery with a large group, i.e. with four other people, which was a bit of a mistake since the tables are too small to accommodate five people comfortably. Still, we crowded round. Between five people we ordered two smoked salmon sandwiches, small, one mushroom and green pepper quiche, two apple pies and one cherry pie, together with three cappuccinos, one espresso and one orange juice.

The food arrived in bits and bobs, and soon there was no place for an elbow on the table. The smoked salmon sandwiches were hardly to blame. They are accurately described as small. The bread, if not inspiring, is passable. The smoked salmon is quite definitely portion-controlled. Slices of onion are hardly the most imaginative other component of the sandwiches, which arrived with a mound of psychedelic *torshi* and a little pile of potato crisps.

The quiche contained tinned mushrooms together with slices of peppers on a faintly soggy pastry base. Nothing to write home about but then to fill letters with notes on quiche would indicate a less than exciting social life. And while some attempt had been made to make the apple pie interesting, with the addition of a few raisins and a hint of cinnamon, it was rather let down by the pastry. The cherry pie was brightly coloured, but once again tasted a little tinned. It was less a product of baking than of assembly.

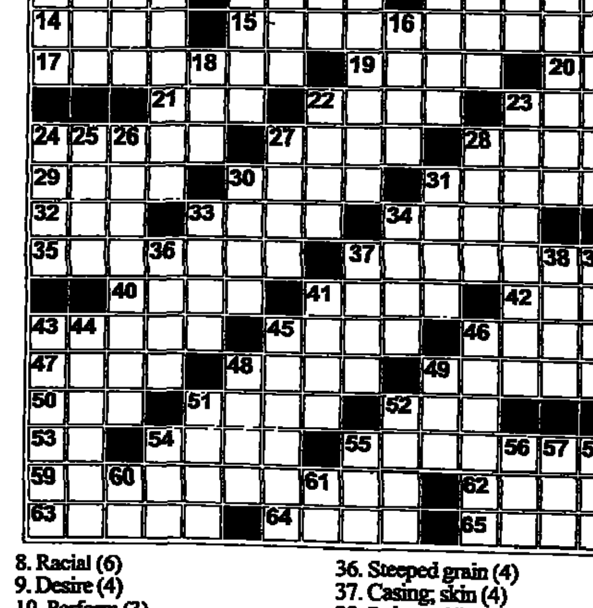
On a more positive note the coffee was actually quite good, and the orange juice fresh. The bill, for five people, none of whom was particularly pleased with what they had eaten, came to just under LE 80. And so, out into the street again. Too cold to linger, too uncomfortable and crowded to kill time around the table, the young men in business suits dotting the other tables hardly the most interesting people to watch... The coffee though was good.

Marriott Bakery, Gameat Al-Duwal Al-Arabia, Mohandessin

Al-Ahram Weekly

Crossword

By Samia Abdennour



Across

1. Prima donna (4)
5. Assistant (4)
9. Middle part of ship or human being (5)
14. Quantity, portion (4)
15. Geometrical instrument; muscle serving to extend limb (10)
17. Place jewel in setting (7)
19. Hound; pursuit (4)
20. roman 51 (2)
21. Poetic for unbolted (3)
22. Contract brow in vertical lines; become close (4)
23. Public notices (3)
24. Degradation; loss of face (5)
27. Monetise (4)
28. Worry; make a fuss about (4)
29. Ripped
30. Political combination to foster a particular interest (4)
31. Mother-of-pearl (5)
32. Crumbs (3)
33. Arab market-place (4)
34. Stylish (4)
35. Windflower; plant akin to buttercup (7)
37. Saurian, lizard or turtle (7)
40. Spoke (4)
41. Make water muddy; irritate (4)
42. Through (3)
43. Run over; pour out (5)
45. Liquid measure (4)
46. Busy insects (4)
47. Warmth (4)
48. Aggregation; connection; unite (4)
49. Dictatorial (5)
50. Fled (3)
51. Jeer; poke fun at (4)
52. Greek letter (3)
53. Some injections, abb. (2)
54. Run the eyes over (4)
55. Draught-horse equipment (7)
59. Desert wild lands, hyph. wds (10)
62. Clatter, applause (4)
63. Nest of birds of prey (5)
64. Breach of duty (4)
65. TV award (4)

DOWN

1. Unpaid (3)
2. Type of lodging (3)
3. Short for Victoria (3)
4. Familiar; agreeable to receive, 2 wds (65)
5. Arched roof at end of church (4)
6. Rage (3)
7. Musical note (2)
8. Racial (6)
9. Desire (4)
10. Perform (3)
11. Pronoun (2)
12. Fusible metallic cement (6)
13. Dreary, melancholy (6)
16. Destruction; downfall (4)
18. Impersonate (3)
22. Crazy or eccentric person, sl. (4)
23. Memorabilia, stack room (8)
24. Covered colonnade (4)
25. Comn (4)
26. Describing some wells (8)
27. Tip-off (4)
28. Abstinence; speedy 94)
30. Nexus (4)
31. Negation (4)
33. Sully (4)
34. Attack; cannonade (4)
36. Steeped grain (4)
37. Casing; skin (4)
38. Relaxes (4)
39. Piece of cake (4)
41. Roller-skating ice sheet (4)
43. Mausoleum (6)
44. Lumberjack's cant-hook (6)
45. Small parcel (6)
46. Resile; gambol (6)
48. Benefit (4)
49. Prohibit (3)
51. In excess (4)
52. Acerbic (4)
54. Garland (3)
55. Pronoun (3)
56. Shade tree (3)
57. Famous Uncle (3)
58. Catch a glimpse of (3)
60. Queen Victoria, abb. (2)
61. Verso, abb. (3)

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Last week's solution

Al-Ahram: A *Diwan* of contemporary life

162 Foreign education in Egypt began to flourish under Khedive Ismail in the second half of the 19th century. The need for Egyptians proficient in French and English arose because France and Britain had the lion's share in capitalist activity then. But the proliferation of foreign schools drew occasional adverse reactions, including charges that these schools were spreading foreign ideologies and causing some Egyptians to neglect their mother tongue and Egyptian history. In this instalment of his chronicles drawn from reports published by *Al-Ahram*, **Dr Yunan Labib Rizk** tells the story of foreign and Egyptian schools during a *critical period* in Egypt's development

"The Berlitz Method" was the caption of a prominent advertisement in *Al-Ahram*'s 14 May 1902 edition. The Committee for the Administration of Language Schools, it announced, had established a branch in Cairo, where "it has taken appropriately luxurious premises at 64 Suleiman Pasha Street behind the Savoy Hotel. Those interested may attend one lesson free of charge. If you are keen to learn French, for example, you will find yourself in a purely foreign environment, as if suddenly you had left Egypt and alighted in one of the major cities of France. Lessons are taught using an audio-visual method in which there is no need for grammar instruction. The school is prepared to provide instruction in French, English, Italian and German. All applicants are welcome."

The "purely foreign environment" with its implication of uprooting Egyptian foreign language students from their "*purely national* environment" raised the controversial issue of foreign language instruction in Egypt, an issue which remains relevant today.

Foreign language schools were introduced into Egypt under Mohamed Ali. They expanded in scope under the Khedive Ismail and proliferated under the British occupation. Until the era of Ismail, these schools provoked little concern, as they were restricted primarily to the foreign communities that established them. However, with Egypt's entrance into the world market under Ismail, the emergence of a new agrarian capitalist class and a government bourgeoisie and the expansion of foreign economic interests in Egypt, there developed a marked rise in the interest in foreign language instruction. The celebrated Egyptian literary scholar, Ahmed Amin, noted this development when he observed, "One of the indications of the popularity of foreign schools is that many notables and dignitaries are sending their sons and daughters to these schools. This even applies to some ministers of education."

In a small publication printed in 1906, Dunlop, the British adviser to the Ministry of Education, cited two major causes for the popularity of these schools. Firstly, Egypt's entrance into the fields of commerce, industry and banking had opened many doors to job opportunities outside government employment. He adds, "Students who are brought up in government schools cannot avail themselves of these opportunities, for without the necessary preparation they cannot hope to rival their compatriots who have been brought up in missionary schools and other foreign institutes which devote particular attention to European languages." Secondly, he argued that government administrations had an increasing need for French and English and that administrative officials complained of the lack of personnel proficient in these two languages.

Such economic factors help explain why the attraction of the foreign schools was not directly related to the size of foreign communities in Egypt. Few Egyptians enrolled in Greek and Italian schools, although these represented the largest foreign communities in Egypt. The French schools by contrast attracted large numbers of Egyptians, partly due to historical, cultural and economic reasons, as well as political factors.

The construction of the modern Egyptian state relied to a considerable extent on French expertise, whether acquired directly through French experts brought into Egypt or indirectly through Egyptian educational and training missions abroad. French, therefore, became the primary second language for the Egyptian *effendi* or government bureaucrat class. French was also the language of high society, not to mention the *lingua franca* of diplomacy, protocol and etiquette. It was a sign of a family's status and distinction for its children to prattle away in the language of Paris. Of course, the British occupation would engender a rising demand for English, particularly among those planning on careers in government administration and those keen on rapid promotion in their careers.

Meanwhile, both the French and British had the lion's share of capitalist activity in the country. Statistics indicate the French capital assets in Egypt amounted to LE 46 million, British capital assets were LE30 million, while Belgian capital assets followed at approximately LE14 million. Of course, French was the *lingua franca* of Belgian institutions in Egypt, the most famous of which was the Electric Tramway Company.

It is noteworthy that it was the Americans, rather than the British, who promoted English language schools. The American mission schools were second only in number and influence to the French language schools. In spite of the very small American community in Egypt in the late 19th century, the Americans had nearly 30 schools with a total enrolment of over 15,000 students, most of whom were Egyptian.

Like the Americans, the majority of the French schools were founded by religious orders, notably the Franciscans and the Jesuits. Given its affinity to French culture in general and the influence of French schools in Egypt, *Al-Ahram* was particularly keen in its coverage of these schools and provides us, therefore, with a rich source of information on the scope and nature of these institutions.

Apart from the numerous such schools in Cairo and Alexandria, *Al-Ahram* reports inform us that they were widely spread throughout the country.

News of the French schools in Cairo and Alexandria, of course, tended to be much more in-depth. *Al-Ahram* provided regular coverage of events at these schools.

In spite of their importance, the American missionary schools were not as closely covered by *Al-Ahram* as their French counterparts. Nevertheless, reports in the newspaper corroborate fairly well-known facts. The overwhelming majority of students in these schools were Egyptian, primarily of Coptic origin. One suspects that Muslims were reluctant to enroll their children in schools run by missionaries for fear of the rumours of their proselytising activities. Most of the teaching staff in these schools were of Egyptian or Levantine origin. At the same time, the Egyptian Coptic Church was hostile to the American schools because of their attempts to convert Copts to Protestantism.

Unlike the French and American schools, the majority of students in the Greek and Italian schools were taken from their respective expatriate communities in Egypt. Although native Egyptian students were in the minority, these schools were keen to highlight the successes of their Egyptian students in order to refute allegations of their being entirely foreign-oriented.

Given the scope and prominence of these schools of a "purely foreign environment" in Egypt, the 19th century would not draw to a close without some form of reaction. "National Schools" was one of the front-page headlines in *Al-Ahram* of 29 August 1898. The accompanying article urges Egyptians to found their own schools in order to counter the spread of foreign schools. "These schools are funded by the great European powers. Individuals from these nations donate huge sums to these institutions and large societies are created in order to administer the moneys that are collected. These nations then dispatch missionaries and proselytisers who are entrusted with the administration of these schools in accordance with the provisions of their charters and political and religious objectives. Although they differ in form, they are alike in their ultimate aims which are to disseminate the language of their respective communities, to instill their morals and customs in the minds of their students and to promote allegiance to their native countries in the students' hearts." The spread of these schools, the author continues, poses certain dangers, one of which is the neglect of the Arabic language — "One finds that many of the Egyptian students of such schools do not even know how to write a letter in their native tongue." — as well as Egyptian history.

At the same time, *Al-Ahram* deplored the educational policies of the British occupation representatives. These policies, it felt, were laying siege to "government education" and, consequently encouraging the spread of foreign language schools. Toward the end of 1898 it wrote, "Not an insignificant number of Egyptian students have enrolled in the Franciscan School in Fayoum after the Ministry of Education shut the doors of its own schools in their faces as the result of a new (British-inspired) system."

Not that government schools did not receive their own share of criticism. One major complaint was that they were not sufficient in number to meet the educational requirements of the public.

A second area of complaint revolved around the quality of education the government schools provided, driving people to enrol their children in foreign schools. The blame for this was again laid at the door of the headmasters "who do not possess modern educational ideas and qualifications." In order to rectify matters in these schools, the ministry should "dismiss all headmasters who do not have the appropriate educational credentials and to promote in their stead members of the modern educational class." Japan, the newspaper noted, has made excellent progress in public educational reform. "If we emulate the high model Japan offers in this domain, and we are indeed capable of that, we should meet with great success."

These circumstances that marked the turn of the century would give rise to an unprecedented drive among Egyptian individuals and societies to build new educational institutions. For religious societies, new schools were among their highest priorities.

It is important to note in this context that many of these societies were particularly concerned with female education. We also read in *Al-Ahram* of "the new Islamic girls school" in Assiut which the newspaper commends as "offering substantial instruction in important subjects and codes of conduct fully conforming to the proper ethical conditions so as to render this institution the only school in Assiut suitable for the education of girls." Perhaps, in so saying, the newspaper was levying indirect criticism against the American school in this Upper Egyptian city.

Members of the large landowning class also contributed to this drive. It was not unusual for prominent members of this class to found schools on their own estates, or at least schools that bore the names of these estates. We thus have the Etay Al-Barroud Estate School from which *Al-Ahram* reported its end-of-year celebrations; the Hussein Bek Qurra Gullali School in Alexandria inaugurated on 9 January 1899 and reported to be "of the highest standards of cleanliness and fully equipped in all aspects"; and the Sheikh Fadl Estate School in Aba Al-Waqf which *Al-Ahram* declared to be "located in a beautiful building on a pleasant site and offering instruction in Arabic and foreign languages in accordance with the government school curriculum."

Two particular individual efforts are of note in this domain, both of which are unique in their own way. Mahmoud Effendi Hamdi al-Sakhawi was the founder of the Hamdiyya School near the Bakkous tramway station in Alexandria. Evidently, he had been an Arabic instructor in other schools but was compelled by his perception of the need to reform the methods of instruction in Egypt to establish a school of his own. This dedicated man himself was the author of an article in *Al-Ahram* in which he wrote, "Egyptians are in need of societies for the establishment of well-administered schools that meet the educational needs of the country, unlike the situation at present in both foreign and government-run schools The former have as their primary aim the promotion of their foreign languages and the latter aims for the eradication of Arabic and ingratiating themselves with the British occupation." In the second instance, the instructor Abduh Assaf strikes out into a new pedagogical direction. *Al-Ahram* announces that Assaf's new evening school "has attracted throngs of young applicants eager to avail themselves of an opportunity for education previously denied to them because of their daytime employment." The advertisement marks Egypt's first venture into evening courses for employees, another indication of the high educational demands of a society undergoing rapid transition.

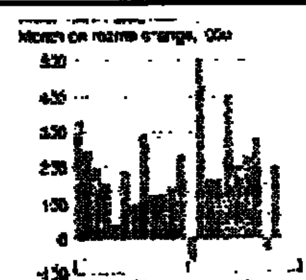
The author is a professor of history and head of Al-Ahram History Studies Centre.

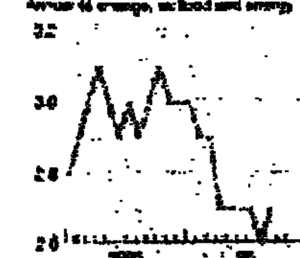


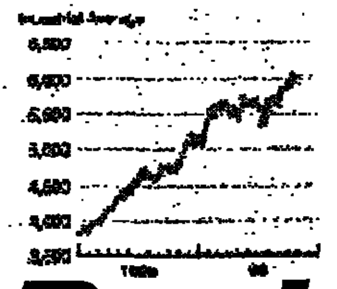
General Motors makes contribution

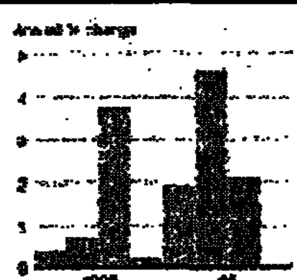
REFLECTING an interest in serving society, General Motors Egypt donated LE25,000 to the Ghada Affi Relief Society during the past year, which was used to establish a large hospital in 6 October City to serve road accident victims.

Mahmoud Serageddin Affi, who first had the idea of establishing such a hospital, explained that the project was the result of concentrated efforts from many individuals and organisations. Ziyad Nashif, chairman of the board of General Moters Egypt, said that company will donate LE50,000 this year to ensure that the association would be able to complete the hospital.









Money & Business

Shura Council hails New Valley project

THE AGRICULTURE and Irrigation Committee of the Shura Council praised the new project known as the New Valley Project, which will run parallel to the Nile Delta. The project is scheduled to be completed after 3 years, and will irrigate 500,000 feddans. President Mubarak will lay the cornerstone of the biggest water plant next January. The committee discussed the steps to be taken to start digging the works which will cover a 30 sq km area.

The committee also paid a visit to Aswan where committee members met with Salah Mesbah, governor of Aswan. The committee recommended setting up plans to upgrade marine wealth in Lake Nasser.

Blue Max sponsoring Al-Ahram computer exhibition

The name Blue Max has been included in the sponsors' list for the Al-Ahram computer exhibition which will take place at the Semiramis Inter-continental Hotel from 27 February to 2 March 1997. Other sponsors of the exhibition include IBM, Xerox, Pack, ETS, National Bank of Egypt, and Banque Misr.

Speaking to the Money and Business, Mustafa Abu Bakr El-Sharawi, executive manager of marketing and sales at Blue Max Computer, noted that our daily life schedule is being arranged on the basis of our favourite routines, such as watching our most beloved TV shows, which if interrupted will make us disappointed. Likewise, we tend to become angry at a surprise telephone call which interrupts our listening of a thrilling radio programme.

Of real importance too is what TV programmes may convey to our children. To have control over these programmes and be able to review and censor what they, may display you need more than an ordinary TV set. You will need to depend on computers which will be connected to the TV or radio stations which will keep the programmes on servers which will be available to viewers.

The idea is to be able to choose the programmes you find suitable at the time you find appropriate. You can also protect your children from viewing scenes you think are inappropriate for them.

An ordinary computer set will not give you the capabilities you need. Gateway 2000 has now introduced a computer with a 31 inch screen with storing capacity starting from 3,8gb, speakers of outstanding quality, wireless control and mouse that gives you control of the set from up to10 metres away. This new product from Blue Max comes at the ninth anniversary of the company.



Indian tea contest

Indian ambassador to Egypt Kanwal Sibal; H S Daasi, head of the India Tea Promotion Department and Mr Baharwash, commercial attaché at the Indian Embassy in Egypt, during a prize distribution party for the Indian Tea Contest.

General assembly for insurance companies held

A GENERAL assembly for four public sector insurance companies was held last week. Minister of Economy Nawal El-Tatawy headed the meeting, which discussed the annual budget and the final balance and profits of the four companies: Misr Insurance Company, headed by Mohamed El-Tair; Al-Sharq Insurance Company, headed by Abul-Soud Al-Sawda; National Insurance Company headed by Mohamed El-Shazli and the Egyptian Re-insurance Company represented by Ahmed Salem, head of financial affairs of the company and a board member.

President of the Insurance Supervisory Board Abdel-Hamid El-Serag, together with vice-president Khairy Selim attended the assembly.

It was only a fortnight ago that El-Tatawy held an extraordinary general assembly meeting with the same companies to discuss their basic organisation and study means to develop them, according to decisions taken by the general assembly held in December 1995.

On the other hand, the past week saw the convening of a similar assembly for private sector insurance companies, which included Suez Insurance Company headed by Mohamed Refat; El-Mohandes Insurance Company headed by Samir Metwally; Delta Insurance Company headed by Fathy Youssef; Pharaonic Insurance Company headed by Munir Ghabbour and United Investors Company headed by Mohamed Hussein Gineidy.

In their meeting the companies discussed their final balance and budgets. It was also revealed that positive figures have been achieved which secures the position of these companies in the Egyptian market.




The fresco of Virgin Mary surrounded by four prophets was discovered by mere chance in 1991. It is described by art experts as one of the most beautiful worldwide *photo: Sherif Sonbol*

Frescoes upon frescoes

Unique frescoes have been discovered at an old church in Wadi El-Natroun. **Sherine Nasr** reports

A seventh century Coptic fresco, discovered by accident in the Virgin Mary Church at the Monastery of the Syrians in Wadi El-Natroun, has experts aflutter with excitement, describing it as among the most beautiful in existence. For centuries, this fresco was hidden underneath another one located in the most ancient part of the church, directly above St Bishoy's hermitage. "It was discovered by mere chance," said Father Martirous, a monk at the monastery.

In 1991, a fire damaged the covering fresco which was marked for cleaning and restoration by a French archaeological mission. While the restoration was being carried out, members of the mission discovered another fresco, with much brighter colours, underneath.

The French team carefully removed the top fresco and an exquisite scene of the Annunciation appeared. The scene depicts the Virgin Mary sitting on a queen's throne. The position of her hands indicates total submission to the message she is receiving from the archangel Gabriel standing in front of her. Moses and Isaiah are on one side, and Ezekiel and Daniel on the other. Each holds a scroll on which his prophecy of the incarnation of Jesus Christ from a virgin is written in Coptic. The fresco, which dates back roughly to the 7th century, was painted by an anonymous artist who, according to art specialists, was extremely talented. "With a few lines he portrayed clear, full faces," said Father Martirous. The fresco still retains its original, astonishingly bright, colours: red, green, blue and beige. "Bright, vivid colours are characteristic of Coptic art," he explained.

This discovery is not the only one in the church. Work done by the Dutch Archaeological Institute has revealed layers of frescoes lying one on top of the other over most of the church's walls. In 1995, the institute made 52 'windows' in the walls at different places on the interior surface of the church and only four did not show frescoes underneath. "One of these windows revealed five layers of frescoes from different eras. The top fresco depicts St Joseph with a halo covered by a layer of Syrian writings," said Father Martirous.

When one of the windows was enlarged, the 3m by 2m area revealed, on the bottom layer, a unique 8th century fresco depicting Abraham, Isaac and Jacob on whose robes small, naked figures hang as symbols of purity.

Two adjacent columns to the right of the church's main sanctuary have also yielded a couple exquisite wall paintings in the unique style of early Coptic art. One depicts the Virgin Mary breast-feeding the baby Jesus, while the other is of an anonymous martyr in military uniform holding a sword in one hand and a cross in the other. "The artist used a wax technique from the earlier Christian eras," Father Martirous said.

Unique from an artistic point of view, the latest discoveries also shed light on important historical facts. The earliest layers are pure Coptic in technique and subject matter, which indicates that the church originally belonged to Egyptian Christians, and not to the Syrian monks who gave the monastery its name: "Monastery of the Syrians."

"The first frescoes of Syrian origin date to the 13th century, when Syrian monks painted their frescoes over the original Coptic works," explained Father You'nas, another monk. The date 1225, for example, appears clearly on a fresco of Jesus' birth adorning the apse to the left of the sanctuary. "The fresco bears both Syrian and Coptic writings," he said, explaining that the church of the Virgin Mary was reserved for the Syrian monks who performed their prayers in their own language. Coptic monks prayed in a church nearby. In time, the Syrian monks covered all of the original Coptic works.

Unaware of the value of the precious artwork in the church, workers unprofessionally painted over as part of a major restoration carried out in the late 18th century.

In addition to the half-explored frescoes, the church is also rich in other art forms. The door to the sanctuary, for example, is a magnificent masterpiece of ebony inlaid with ivory. Made in the 10th century, "the door of symbols" features seven rows of very different crosses that are believed to symbolise either a historical fact or a future revelation. "For example, the third row of the door has a cross encircled by a crescent, indicating the emergence of Islam," said Father You'nas. "On the bottom row, there is one large, radiant cross, prophesying the advent of Christ."

The sanctuary is one of the oldest in Egypt. It is ornamented with moulded and carved stucco featuring early Christian symbols: fish, grapes, palm leaves and the prophet David's musical instruments.

The most ancient part of the church is St Bishoy's hermitage, lying at the western entrance, but actually regarded as the nucleus of the monastery.

"In the fourth century, there was only this cave where St Bishoy remained in seclusion," said Anba Meta'os, head of the monastery. A low, narrow passage leads to a small room where the saint prayed. A rope hanging from the ceiling is believed to have been used by the saint to tie his hair lest he should fall asleep while reciting his prayers. St Bishoy's disciples later joined him, each in a separate cell and it was much later, in the 9th century, that these rooms were encompassed inside a wall forming an independent monastery.

The earliest cell has recently been restored and is open to visitors. It consists of two small windowless rooms, a basket, water skin and a large jar. The door to the cell is so low that one has to bend to enter. "This was a sign of modesty. It was also a reminder of how narrow the path to heaven is," said Father You'nas.

The monastery treasures a 16-century tree known as St. Ephraem the Syrian's tree. "St. Ephraem used to lean on a stick because of his old age. He once placed it in the ground, and to the monks' astonishment, it sprouted a shoot and grew into a huge tree that remains green," explained Father You'nas.

An open-air museum in the monastery displays some objects used by early monks, including a cart, a millstone and a waterwheel.

The newly discovered frescoes have been covered with plexiglass in order to protect them.

A museum will soon be built where the layers of the frescoes which have been removed, will be preserved. "We will not be content until we find a means to preserve our discoveries, otherwise they could be lost forever," said Father Martirous.

How to get there

Buses

Super Jet, East Delta and West Delta buses operate throughout Egypt.

Super Jet

Super Jet stations are located in Almaza (Heliopolis), Tahrir, Giza, Ramsis Street and Cairo Airport. Buses travel to Alexandria, Port Said, Hurghada and Sinai. Tel. 772-663.

Cairo-Alexandria
Services almost every half hour from 5.30am to 10pm, from Tahrir, then Giza, Almaza and the airport. Tickets LE19 until 9pm; LE21 thereafter; from the airport LE24 until 5pm; LE30 thereafter.
A VIP bus with phone access leaves Almaza at 7.15am. Tickets from Almaza LE28; from the airport LE32 each way.

Cairo-Marsa Matrouh
Services at 7am departure and 7pm return from Almaza and Tahrir Square. Tickets LE36
Cairo-Sidi Abdel-Rahman
Services at 6.30am, 7am, 8am, 9am and 3.45pm. Tickets LE32
Cairo-Port Said
Services every half hour from 6am to 8am; then 9am, 10am, 3pm, and 4.30pm, from Almaza, then Ramsis Street. Tickets LE15 each way.

Alexandria-Port Said
Service 6.45am, from Ramleh Square in Alexandria. Departs Port Said 3.30pm. Tickets LE22 each way.

Cairo-Hurghada
Services 8am and 2pm, from Tahrir, then Giza and Almaza. Departs Hurghada noon and 5pm. Tickets LE40 until 5pm, LE45 thereafter, both each way.

Alexandria-Hurghada
Service 8pm, from Ramleh Square, Alexandria. Departs Hurghada 2.30pm. Tickets LE60 each way.

Cairo-Sharm El-Sheikh
Service 11pm, from Tahrir, then Almaza. Departs Sharm El-Sheikh 11pm. Tickets LE50 each way.

East Delta Bus Company

Buses travel to North/South Sinai Sinai, Suez and Ismailia. Buses to Ismailia and Suez depart from Qulali (near Ramsis Square), Almaza and Tagnid Square (near Heliopolis). Buses to North and South Sinai depart from the Sinai bus station at Abbassiya Square. Tel. 482-4753.

Cairo-Ismailia
Services every 45 minutes from 6.30am to 6pm, from Qulali, then Almaza and Tagnid Square. Tickets deluxe bus LE5.75; air-conditioned bus LE5.25, one way.

Cairo-Suez
Services every half an hour from 6am to 7pm, from Qulali, then Almaza and Tagnid Square. Tickets deluxe bus LE5.75; air-conditioned bus LE5, one way.

Cairo-El-Arish
Services every hour from 7.30am to 4pm, from Qulali, then Almaza and Tagnid Square. Tickets deluxe bus LE21; air-conditioned bus LE13, one way.

Cairo-Sharm El-Sheikh
Services every 45 min. from 7am to 6.30pm from Abbassiya, then Almaza. Tickets morning LE27; evening LE40, one way.
Cairo-Nuweiba
Service 8am, from Abbassiya, then Almaza. Tickets deluxe bus LE31.

West Delta Bus Company

Stations at Tahrir and Almaza. Tel. 243-1846.

Cairo-Hurghada
Services 9am, noon, 3pm, 10.30pm, 10.45pm and 11pm. Tickets LE30 one way.

Cairo-Safaga
Services 9am and 3pm. Tickets LE35 one way.

Cairo-Quseir
Service 10pm. Tickets LE38 one way.

Cairo-Luxor
Service 9am. Tickets LE35 one way.

Cairo-Aswan
Service 5pm. Tickets LE50 one way.

Trains

Trains run to Alexandria, Port Said, Luxor and Aswan, from Ramsis Station. Tel. 147 or 575-3555.

Cairo-Luxor-Aswan
"French" deluxe trains with sleepers
Services to Luxor and Aswan 7.40pm and 9pm (reaching Luxor 6.40 am and 8am, Aswan 8.40am and 10am). Tickets to Luxor LE294 for foreigners and LE129 for Egyptians, to Aswan LE300 for foreigners; LE141 for Egyptians.
"Spanish" deluxe trains without sleepers
Services to Luxor and Aswan 6.45pm, 8.45pm and 9.45pm. Tickets to Luxor: first class LE51; second class LE31. Tickets to Aswan: first class LE63; second class LE37.

Cairo-Alexandria
"Torbini" trains
VIP train: Service 8am. Tickets first class LE32 with a meal; LE22 without a meal.
Standard trains: Services 9am, 11am, noon, 5pm and 7pm. Tickets first class LE22; second class LE17.
"French" trains
Services hourly from 6am to 10.30pm. Tickets first class LE20; second class LE12.

Cairo-Port Said
Services 6.20am and 8.45am. Tickets first class LE45; second class LE26.

EgyptAir

There are between two and five domestic flights daily. Check EgyptAir: Adly 390-0999; Opera 390-2444; or Hilton 772410

Cairo-Aswan
Tickets LE351 for Egyptians, LE1143 for foreigners, both round-trip.

Cairo-Luxor
Tickets LE259 for Egyptians, LE829 for foreigners, both round-trip.

Cairo-Hurghada
Tickets LE279 for Egyptians, LE898 for foreigners, both round-trip.

Cairo-Sharm El-Sheikh
Tickets LE287 for Egyptians, LE945 for foreigners, both round-trip.

Compiled by **Rehab Saad**

Egypt's oldest profession

Pottery manufacture is one of the oldest industries in Egypt, as **Harold Westin** discovers



Photo: Antoune Albert

After 5,000 years of cultural development, the ancient art of Egyptian pottery is still alive and well today. A tour of the Cairo Museum and the streets of Old Cairo revealed that nothing of Ancient Egypt is as well preserved as the practice of pottery.

According to the displays at the museum, craftsmen of the past would squat beside turn wheels fixed low to the ground and, with skilled hands, raise sturdy vessels from conical lumps of clay. The museum's collection serves as a small sample of the delightfully varied fruits of this practice. Some pots were built stronger than others to withstand the heat of cooking and the constant handling of storage. Others were more delicately fashioned, playing a decorative role while holding plants or perching on tables. Pottery formed to hold cosmetic powders and oils boasted intricate shapes of animals and birds.

Even though clay pots today play a lesser role in everyday affairs, the method of preparing the clay still remains intact. Sand, water and hands are the cornerstones of this timeless formula. According to the records in the museum, clay was first soaked in a pit of water to soften the material before the potter kneaded his way through the mass to chase out any unwanted air pockets. If water was not in ready supply, the clay could be kneaded in a tempering material such as sand or limestone. In preparation, the craftsman would position the clay into the same familiar conical lump on the potter's wheel as is depicted in the Saqqara tomb reliefs.

In Old Cairo, I found a potter preparing his clay in much the same way, kneading and shaping his way to a form which he then smoothed with his hands before leaving it to dry in the sun. After the clay hardened to a leather-like stiffness, its surface was smoothed once more by cloth. This particular craftsman also coated the pot with a sealing pigment before firing, improving durability as well as appearance.

Following the traditions of the ancients closely, he worked alone on the pots. If his son were beside him, he could help in the art as the rest of the family would collect fuel for the kilns, carry the raw clay to his side and add finishing touches to the pots before firing. The reliefs of pottery making found in the tombs do not depict women as participants in the industry.

As with some traditional crafts in practice today, demands to increase speed and uniformity of manufacture have led to changes in methodology. The potters of Egypt are an exception to this rule. Aside from minor modifications to the kilns, now loaded from the side instead of the top, the ancients' ways remain.



Air France and Le Méridien Le Caire had the pleasure to invite a large number of their clients to celebrate the end of the year 1996. Present at this event were His Excellency Mr. Jean-Mare De La Sablière, the French ambassador in Egypt accompanied by his spouse. (Picture shows from left to right Mr. & Mrs. Marc Emy, Air France manager in Egypt, Mr. & Mrs. Jean-Marc De La Sablière, the French ambassador in Egypt, Mr. Yves Picchi, Air France regional delegate for the Middle East and Mr. & Mrs. Simon Moore, general manager Le Méridien Le Caire.

Out of sports

The very thought fills some educators with despair, but the government is resolute in its determination to salvage school sports from the doldrums into which they have fallen. **Eman Abdel-Moeti** reports



photos: Eman Abdel-Moeti



"And... stretch!" Little room for PE has left students cramped and schools bursting at the seams. Will the future bring with it bigger playgrounds?

School and sports. They used to fit together like hand in glove. But *in the past four decades school sports* activities have taken a back seat as the beleaguered Ministry of Education sought means to cope with the burgeoning number of students entering the education system. The population explosion has forced schools, faced with overcrowded classrooms, to build more facilities on land that had previously been utilised as play and sport areas. *This effectively wiped out physical* education (PE) as a viable part of the school curricula.

Students, excluding the lucky few able to join expensive sporting clubs, have had to adopt a catch-as-catch-can approach to sports amidst their studies and social life.

The sorry state of PE in the country became glaringly obvious when the Egyptian delegation to the Atlanta Olympics failed to win a single medal. Sports officials came to the conclusion that the 17 million-strong student population *comprises an untapped reservoir of talent that* was being overlooked due to the absence of coordinated sports programmes in schools. The former emphasis had been focused on developing the relatively small percentage of athletes, numbering in the hundreds at best, practising in sporting clubs.

Prime Minister Kamal El-Ganzouri, in his dual capacity as head of the Supreme Council for Youth and Sports (SCYS), sought to address the imbalance by inaugurating the Experts Committee. The committee, consisting of eminent sports authorities, was set the task of devising a five-year plan to eradicate the obstacles that had accumulated to the detriment of school sports.

"We cannot expect to solve all the problems that have accumulated over 40 years in one year," explained committee member Ibrahim Hegazi, editor-in-chief of the sports weekly, *Al-Ahram Al-Riyadi*, in response to questions concerning the state of physical education and the lack of facilities. "For the schools that still have playgrounds, but in a deteriorated condition, a sum of LE40 million has been allocated for their restoration," added Hegazi, "As for the schools without facilities, the sports centres will be made available for the time being."

But if any programme is to succeed it will have to be revolutionary enough to jolt sports out of the lethargic state into which it has currently slumped. As it stands many students find the present programme set by the *Ministry of Education, to say the least, less than* appealing. "I don't want to play gymnastics or any other sport in particular," said one a fifth-grader, "I just want to exercise on my own."

Although Prime Minister El-Ganzouri allotted LE40 million to double PE teachers' salaries last year, filling vacancies with qualified PE teachers remains a difficulty for the *short* term. The competition *with sports clubs*, able to pay higher salaries, for proficient sports educators has contributed to the ineffectiveness of sports education. It is hoped that with the pecuniary infusion provided by the prime minister, the hiring of motivated staff and the introduction of creative activities will attract students.

The development of the PE syllabus was one of the top priorities on the Experts Committee's agenda and a well-*balanced programme, initially to be applied to the govern*orates of Cairo, Giza, Qalyubia and Alexandria, has been designed to draw students to all kinds of sports activities.

Monetary incentives similar to those granted to school age world champions will now be presented to champions on the national level. "In the past we used to grant world cup and Olympic medal winners an eight per cent *bonus on the aggregate of their grades,*" explained committee member Mohamed Abdel-Khalek Allam, "This reward will now be allotted to local champions as well."

But as Amal Ibrahim, a mother of two sons pointed out, the eight per cent incentive will make little difference unless the syllabus is reduced. "My boys return from school at three, eat their snack, change and get ready to study for at least three or more hours," lamented Ibrahim, "After *that they hardly have time to eat dinner before it is time* for them to go to sleep. I can't have them wasting their time at some sports club,"

Ibrahim's was but one of many voices raised against the syllabus and the Experts Committee recommendation concerning the easing of the syllabus has been taken up by the Ministry of Education.

"Thanks to the cooperation we have received from Minister of Education Hussein Kamel Bahaeddin, the primary school syllabus will be distributed over six years instead of five," said Hegazi. "As for the preparatory and secondary schools, their syllabus will be reduced this school year."

Another committee recommendation undertaken by the ministry to increase the school meals budget from *LE130 million to LE300 million for primary school stu*dents underlines its seriousness of purpose. But while the Ministry of Education's commitment is indisputable it will be an uphill battle to change perceptions ingrained over the last 40 years.

One final committee suggestion to define a prerequisite minimum PE grade before allowing students to continue to the next year was greeted by one parent with the cynical humour peculiar to Egypt. "Now students will be obliged to take private PE lessons like they do in other subjects in order to pass the end of year exams."

Egypt win despite hooliganism

Last week the African Junior Basketball Cup ended with the victory of the Egyptian team. **Osama Khalil** reports from Casablanca

Amidst Moroccan curses and showers of stones and empty bottles, the Egyptian junior basketball team still managed to clinch the African Juniors Basketball Cup for the second time, and qualify for the World Cup slated in Australia next year.

The African Juniors cup played on the Mohamed V court in Casablanca turned into a heated competition between Egypt, Algeria, *Tunisia*, Côte d'Ivoire, and *Morocco last* week. For *the Egyptian junior team the other teams* were considered a piece of cake except for the Moroccan team who played on their land and enjoyed the roaring cheers of about 10,000 spectators.

The Egyptian basketball team won their games against Tunisia 80-71, and against Côte D'Ivoire 72-68, then they took a deep breath before meeting with the Moroccans, the toughest contenders. Egyptian coaches *Khaled Bikhit and Ahmed Saber tightened the team's* training schedule before their game with Morocco the next day. The team were already exhausted for playing all the previous games one after the other without enough training hours in between.

The team had every right to be nervous especially when they saw the game between Morocco and Algeria *the day before: As the Algerian team scored one point* after another in a successful attempt to win, the Moroccan fans cheered fiercer and fiercer. Before the end of the match, the Moroccan defeat had turned into a victory.

On the day of the Egypt-Morocco game, their coach was pretty certain about their victory over Egypt, saying in a press conference, "we are playing to win, and the game is on our court."

The Egypt-Morocco game witnessed the highest spec*tator turn out in the championship with about all Mo*roccan basketball fanatics present. Things started to get out of hand as the Egyptian team lead the game 42-25. Glass-bottles, stones, and anything the Moroccan fans could get their hands on were thrown at the Egyptian team on court. Unfortunately the police failed to control the situation and the judges had to stop the game.

"They were cursing us as we were still changing in the locker-room," complained one Egyptian team-member.

President of the African Basketball Federation Abdullah Si said to *Al-Ahram*, "this is the first case of basketball hooliganism to happen ever on African courts. This is unprecendented." On the other hand, most of the judges and organising officials agreed that this unusual hostile attitude by the Moroccan fans towards the Egyptians in specific is a reaction to similar attitudes by Egyp*tian fans whether in the media or in Cairo Stadium dur*ing the football match between both teams last October.

Explaining the situation Ahmed El-Merensi vice-president of the Moroccan Basketball Federation said, "Don't accuse us of hostile actions, we love the Egyptians but before the football match, your media kept describing it as a war urging your team to defeat us like in a war." Merensi added, "this of course provoked us especially when the media described us as the enemy. Besides, *the Egyptian fans also threw stones and glass bot*tles at our team on the pitch."

In view of the uncontrollable hooliganism, the judges announced the victory of the Egyptian team regardless of the outcome of their game the next day against the Algerian team. However, Egypt won Algeria 82-68 and earned the Juniors African Cup.

Egyptians sweep Nile regatta

Participants in the 24th International Nile Rowing Championship spent a week of sport and sightseeing in Luxor. **Nashwa Abdel-Tawab** reports



Row, Egyptians, row

Four thousand years ago, during the reign of the Pharaoh Akhnaton, oarsmen would *gather on the Nile in front* of Luxor Temple, capital of the kingdom of Ancient Egypt, to compete in an annual royal regatta, known as the Festival of Oars. The competition ran from Luxor to Karnak Temple — a 2,000-metre race. Temple walls reveal evidence of rowing as a popular sport, with representations *of* Pharaonic crews from different dynasties.

Twenty-five years ago, in 1971, the race was *rowed again for the first time since* antiquity, renamed the Nile International Rowing Championship, with all the trappings of a *modern international* rowing regatta. Held in Luxor and Cairo, the boats were outrigger shells, and university and club teams from up to 18 countries took part.

The historic setting of the event gave overseas visitors a unique opportunity to experience top class rowing against a backdrop of the ancient monuments, and some attempts were made to provide displays for the visitors by reviving ancient traditions. For example, the first team to finish the race from Luxor to Karnak Temple follow the ancient tradition of carrying their boats through the temple's *Ram's Passage* to the Sacred Lake, where they would celebrate their victory and ask for the pharaoh's blessing.

When the first modern regatta was held, only Eygptian teams were allowed to take part in the revival of this ancient race. But then the Egyptian Rowing Federation decided to invite the teams from Oxford and Cambridge universities, and they were later joined by other foreign teams.

In 1975 the Rowing Federation held *the race on the Suez Canal* at Ismailia *to* celebrate the reopening of the canal after the October 1973 victory. In 1982, the *regatta officially* became an international open event, by increasing the number of races from one to eight, rowed in modern outrigger shells. The Nile International Rowing Championship has been listed on the official calendar of international rowing events since 1988.

Turnout was disappointing this year. Although 86 invitations were sent to the International Rowing Federation and 30 to foreign clubs, only eight teams took part, from Germany, the United States, Slovakia and Hungary, in addition to *three Egyptian clubs*.

Seven of the races took place in Luxor, nine in Cairo, for both junior and senior oarsmen. Egypt came first overall in the competition with a total of eight wins, with Egypt's top oarsman, Ali Ibrahim, facing a neck and neck battle with the Slovakian, Stock Coop, in the skiff event. Ibrahim, who came eighth in the '96 Olympics skiff and is ranked fourth in the world, eventually managed to edge ahead of Coop, number one in the '95 World Championships in Finland and fourth in the '96 Olympics, in both Luxor and Cairo. Ibrahim was satis*fied with his performance and said that it* had put him in competitive mood to face Coop and his other rivals in the Mediterranean Championship in Italy next year.

The Egyptian Rowing Federation is currently trying to boost the sport by encouraging young rowers to participate in competitions. This event is a fine chance for them to do that, but the regatta would have a higher profile if it could once again attract a large number of foreign teams. But expense, mainly the high price of air tickets to Egypt, seems to have been responsible for discouraging foreign participation. Nevertheless, the unique setting and hard-paced rowing *made the 1996 Nile International Rowing* Championship an unforgettable event.

Edited by **Inas Mazhar**

Garside's marathon

BRITON Robert Garside, who set out to take the world in his stride, arrived in Zurich *after a 10-hour 85-kilometre* run from Basel. Garside left London on 7 December and expects to be back in the British capital after running another 53,000 kilometres around the world, by the end of the century. His next stop will be Munich, Germany.

Garside's 50 country marathon is aimed at drawing attention to the state of the Earth and man-made ecological problems.

The third pullout

A VIRUS has forced Germany's Steffi Graf to withdraw from the Hopman Cup mixed team tennis event. Tournament officials said. Graf will be replaced by Petre Begerow, 21, ranked 63rd in the world.

Officials said Graf contracted a virus which caused a high fever on Christmas Day and has been ordered by her doctors not to travel for four to five days. It's Graf's third pullout in as many years from the Hopman Cup.

A spokesperson for Graf said she will fly to Melbourne at the end of next week to prepare for the Australian Open which begins on 13 January.

Becker will play

TOURNAMENT director, Paul McNamee has revealed that defending champion, Boris Becker, has confirmed he will play in next month's Australian Open.

Speaking at the Hopman Cup, McNamee said he had received a fax message from Becker's management saying the German player has recovered from an ankle injury sustained in training that forced his withdrawal from a tournament in Doha, Qatar.

The Australian Open will be played from 13-26 Jan at the National Tennis Centre in Melbourne.

Halard-Decugis out

FRENCH number one women's tennis player, Julie *Halard-Decugis, withdrew* last Sunday from the Australian Tennis Open because of a knee injury, organisers said. The 26-year-old was also forced out of the US$175,000 Gold Coast Classic tournament beginning at Hope Island, south of Australia.

Happy New Year

BRAZILIAN star striker Ronaldo will have to make alternate plans for New Year's Eve. Barcelona coach Bobby Robson has vetoed his returning home for New *Year's eve as punishment* for missing a training session.

Ronaldo, a hot contender for this year's FIFA Player of the Year award, was due back for training, after spending Christmas at his home. Due to international flight delays Ronaldo only arrived back in time to join the team for the afternoon training session.

Robson decided to schedule the 20-year old for a personal training session on 31 December as a disciplinary measure.

Tata Zaki:

Dances with kings

Balls at the palace and summers by the sea — but there was more to life for Cairo's most beautiful woman


portrait: Edmond Soussa

At the end of the second world war, Cairo bubbled with excitement, a cosmopolitan capital that had danced away news from the faraway fronts, and was now enjoying the fruits of peace. There were many good reasons to celebrate. Egypt had emerged from the war unscathed and attracted thousands of Europeans escaping from countries which had not yet recovered from the consequences of armed conflict. Business was booming, the pound was strong and the restrictions few and far between. Foreigners were welcome. They found peace and prosperity in Egypt and a carefree climate in which they were happy to revel.

While Egyptians from the petty bourgeoisie, the bourgeoisie and the working classes participated in the political arena, the landed gentry, who nevertheless harboured strong nationalistic feelings, had become very fond of the British way of life, enjoying the clubs, the sports and the spirit among other Anglo-Saxon imports.

Maadi, a suburb south of Cairo, literally resembled — minus the cold and rain — a little piece of the British countryside, with its little cottages, its manicured lawns and its golf course. English was spoken, uses and manners were Victorian. British and French nannies pushed elegant perambulators along the shaded avenues, while older children rode around the suburb on their bicycles. With the change of seasons, the suburb turned from pink to blue to yellow, depending on which trees were in full bloom. A number of Egyptians, feeling at home in such surroundings, built comfortable villas for their families.

Tata Zaki grew up in Maadi. Her father was a high government official and her mother, a great-granddaughter of Suleiman El-Fransawi, was a scion of the Egyptian aristocracy. The family was very artistic and Tata grew up surrounded with paintings, music and literature, in a milieu where elegance and social graces were revered. "Everything was simple then, and I was happy," she says. Discipline was strict at home and at the Maadi British school, but she took it in her stride. Besides, by the time she was fourteen, she was allowed to accompany her parents to the extraordinary balls and soirees which Princess Shewikar (King Fouad's first wife) was so fond of throwing in her palaces, in Garden City in winter and Marg in summer. Tata was thoroughly coached before such occasions, where knowledge of many topics would be necessary: for instance, how to accept a dance with the king, who was a regular guest at these festivities, and how to avoid being noticed by the handsome cavalry officers, whom her mother assured her were up to no good. She was already a stunning beauty. Special ball gowns were made for these occasions. Tata remembers appearing once in pink, another time in blue. These balls were second only in splendour to those attended by her grandmother at the Shubra Palace (Mohamed Ali's palace, now part of the Faculty of Agriculture, Ain Shams University). The women of the aristocracy attending these balls used to gather weeks in advance, as her grandmother often told her, and, inspiring themselves from famous paintings, created *tableaux vivants* which always drew cries of surprised admiration from the guests. The palace garden was also decorated by their able hands,, with hundreds of colourful crepe paper flowers produced during the long evenings preceding the event then threaded into endless garlands with which they covered the palace's pillars. With the little boats filled with guests, dotting the lake with their twinkling lights, those evenings must have been fairy tales come to life, muses Tata dreamily. To this day the splendour of palace life is a subject of admiration for her. She is a royalist at heart, not because she is politically inclined towards a monarchical system really, but because she has been, and still is, so fond of pomp and circumstance. Royal is a word that conjures up magnificent horse-drawn carriages, a regal hand raised in gracious salute on a palace balcony, a whole complicated ceremonial perfected by long tradition, a deep respect for national symbols... Kings and queens are among these symbols, above ordinary people and should not have to deal with the unpalatable reality of the everyday, she says firmly.

But Princess Shewikar's balls notwithstanding. Tata became bored with the monotony of her life. Her friends at school spoke of more excitement than that which her strict upbringing would permit. She was soon married. But her new life did not agree with her. She could not settle down in marriage. What she wanted was to do things on her own. She had been sheltered for a long time but with the revolution, many fortunes changed. She realised that she would now have to earn a living. She was good with her hands. She had inherited from her father a talent for painting. An intuitive sense in creating artistic surroundings made a success of her first attempt at independence. With her former sister-in-law she opened Mouche, a boutique in Zamalek which became an instant attraction, not so much for the merchandise on sale but for the inexhaustible creativity of Tata, who began drawing on Egyptian folklore for inspiration. She made lamps out of the quintessentially Egyptian clay pots, topping their vaguely feminine forms with straw shades in the shape of little country girls' faces, complete with tresses and ribbons, dyed men's undervests in all the colours of the rainbow, and made cushions and *galabiyas* or shirts out of the most unexpected material. There was always something new on offer. She sold good taste. It was simple, not expensive and very vibrant. Everybody crowded the shop, to buy or to just look. A few fashion shows were organised in a fun sort of way and Tata, who by now had the established reputation of being incontestably the most beautiful woman in Cairo, modelled her own creations along with the professionals.

Mouche did not use up all her energy and she soon took on the decoration of what was going to be the most famous night spot of 1960s Cairo, the Goha, a landmark for a whole generation. There again, Tata's interpretation of Egyptian folklore had come in handy. The bar was a simple donkey cart painted in traditional colours of red, blue, green and yellow. Goha — the wise fool of Egyptian proverbs — figured in many decorative motifs. By the time the Goha began to take off, however, Tata was already looking towards other horizons. She wanted to travel. She was asked to decorate a night club in London, in her inimitable Egyptian style; she tried her hand at fashion, finally becoming a major buyer for a grand couturier, a job that required her to travel extensively in Europe. She loved the job, the lifestyle — everything.

At his point she was approached by the famous chocolate-makers, Richou, who offered to train her as a hostess for one of their London outlets. This was a new but thoroughly enjoyable experience. Apart from selling the actual products, the position entailed inviting lots of friends over for coffee and other delicacies and generally playing hostess to Richou's patrons. It was like having intimate little parties in her own home.

After a while, however, she began to feel homesick. Her mother was unwell. She came back for a visit. Except for a few days here and there she had not been back in Egypt for almost twenty years. Old friends, old places were beckoning. Maadi had changed, but not enough not to conjure up fond memories. She decided to stay. A job in an antique shop not far from where she lives presented itself at the right moment. Her talents were required. She set to work.

When she is not at the shop these days, she paints, or decorates her lovely apartment. Her paintings and those of her father, who loved to paint landscapes featuring ducks, adorn the walls. The furniture is predominantly English, mostly family pieces. But there is a sort of humour about the place which unmistakably announces that the owner does not take herself seriously. Her blue chinchilla cat, a British import, grudgingly shares the sunny spots with her on the cosy veranda. She loves her old friends and entertains frequently. She visits her son in the States periodically, but is happy to return home. She hate crowds. "I am a very shy person," says the woman who for years made all heads turn, from Cairo to London and back.

*Profile by **Fayza Hassan***



by Madame Sosostris



My very dear friend George Bahgory who is currently taking part in the exhibition *Coptic Depictions* at the Cairo Picasso Art Gallery, thought of honouring me with a few strokes of his famous pen. Well darlings, my anticipation turned to sorrow when I saw myself through my good friend's eyes. Why my worst enemies only pictured me like an ageing Queen Victoria! Really George!

♥ Well, dears, here we are, at the end of the little lane called 1996. I don't know about you, but I personally don't like to dwell on the past. I can't do anything about it anymore, right? So let us put it behind us, I say, and on to New Year's resolutions. For starters, I don't intend to diet this year; everyone is doing it, and it has become quite passé. At one of the many Christmas parties I attended last week, everybody was starving for one reason or another. The craze these days is to send a sample of your blood to London, where it is analysed. Then they write back to you and tell you what makes you fat. One of my friends, who has dieted in vain for years, sent off a sweet little vial and back came the diagnosis, just like magic. Unfortunately, he can only consume large quantities of hot red pepper. Everything else is off limits.

Never mind that, dears, I have decided that, as far as I am concerned, 1997 will be the year of the binge. Of course, this resolution will have its drawbacks, what with **Dior** coming to town, but one must pay the price of one's convictions. Anyway, as I told Dior representative **Brigitte Lefebvre** that fashion designers should really make room for an occasional dinner in their creations. I myself — in my spare time, of course — have whipped up a few concoctions for the terminally pudgy and, of course, the numerous mothers-to-be among my acquaintances. Our own **Nevine El-Aref**, who just gave birth to bouncing Amr, told me she wished she could plan another baby, just to wear one of my ingenious extensible fourreaux. They, and a few of my other designs, may be adapted to singles or twins, and look quite elegant, I assure you.

As you well know, when I am not busy exercising one of my multiple talents, I party — and did I ever on this New Year's eve. Had I not adhered strictly to a Draconian schedule, I would never have been able to open the buffets at each of the eleven parties to which I was invited. But being me, I managed of course, albeit at the price of a mild indigestion. Anyway, now I know for sure who cooks the best turkey in town, an important tip to keep in mind for next year.

♦ I must leave you, dears, much to my regret, but my artistic talents are required at Khan El-Maghrabi, where I will be helping **Salwa Maghrabi** set up the new exhibition, A Sonnet of Colour and Sculpture (a title obviously inspired by yours truly), which is opening today. See you there, and an eternally scrumptious new year.



